

An Essay Concerning Love

Amor V. Omnia

PREFACE

I was hosting a large dinner party that night and needed more glasses. I remembered that I had a box of glasses in my basement, and so I descended. I never thought in a thousand years I'd stumble upon something that would forever change my life. However, the world is an absurd place. It is not God that works in mysterious ways. He is quite predictable. It is the universe that does.

The shelf had been there long before I moved in, and I never replaced it since it appeared entirely functional. Ask any of my friends and they'll corroborate the claim that I rank among the most frugal people in Canada. I lifted the box of mugs off the shelving, causing the rusted metal bars to shake. I thought nothing of it until I heard a thud beside me. It sounded not like glass or metal but rather like a book. I cocked my neck to the side; lo and behold, before me was a small leatherbound notebook. It was rough around the edges, the leather cracked and dry from what must've been years of hiding. I placed the box of mugs down on the paved floor and bent to pick up the notebook. At first I hesitated, letting myself feel the notebook in my hands. Then, I opened it to the first page. There was a brief inscription written on it in black ink and messy handwriting. It read:

I know not why I am here,
In this world so cold and so bleak;
Despair grips me in the night, and anxiety
During the day.
If someone should come across this journal,
Know that I am yours now to keep in mind and in heart
And that thou may not know my name, but thou shall know more about me
Than even my closest confidants!

Curiosity set in. I forgot about the glasses and the dinner party while I walked back up the steps and into my living room. Sitting on a couch, I flipped through the pages, all filled with the same handwriting in the same black ink over a period of no more than a year. Contained within was not only some of the most unique prose I'd ever read (and I've read much) but also some of the most philosophically profound ideas I'd ever come across. Everything this young boy wrote, subconsciously and consciously, was nested in the concept of love. Love both specifically (that is, in relation to an individual) and generally (that is, in relation to the whole universe) were both part of his philosophical calculation. In the first several entries, starting around October of 2021, he hadn't quite figured it out. Then he started catching on about four months in before triumphantly declaring in his last entry on September 21st, 2022:

L'amour is everything. A person who does not know love leads a life of quiet desperation. Every philosopher has tried to discover the meaning of life, and

every one has had his own particular way to go about it. Call me naive, call me a foolish boy, but my method is to assume all good things come first from love and end in beauty; and that, therefore, one must first understand love if one is to also understand the meaning of life.

It is now time I step into the love and feel its warm embrace.

The complete transformation of the writer struck me as extraordinary. Rarely can one find peace with oneself, let alone with the universe. Yet this Anonymous Boy managed it. Reposed on my sofa, I thought back to all the events in my life, one by one. I had always thought of the tragedies, the ups the downs, the victories and the defeats as a beautiful collage that defined my life and character. Beauty was the thing that connected everything, bad and good; it was philosophy's equivalent to the strong force, holding everyone and thing together in the face of an overwhelming paradox. But now I began to see between all the bricks a different mortar, that of love.

In a flash, it became evident to me that someone had to investigate these ideas further. Yes, someone had to go through this journal and find all the parts the author had gotten right and wrong and take it just that one step further, towards greatness. As a diary, it was emotional and moving; it was how he felt in that very moment. I have no doubt that the author, in the end, stepped into the warm embrace of love, thereby transforming into a new and healthier version of himself. But that is precisely why that journal was there and not burned in some fire pit—because he managed to move on enough that this past self meant nothing to him anymore. Let future generations judge me, he must have thought, for I am now a better me, a stronger me, a me that no longer requires such silly notions. In other words, he became even stronger than his own philosophy, which is why it was allowed to rot away in some stinky basement.

I wanted—in fact, felt compelled—to revive the ideas and bring them once more into the light of day. But how to go about it? Kierkegaard once said that life must be lived forwards but can only be understood backwards. A diary, yes, was a snapshot of someone living life forwards; on the other hand, a critical essay is an attempt to understand life backwards. I would embark on a mission, a harrowing mission, to understand his life and, by extension, his ideas backwards for him.

Just as Alexis de Tocqueville set out to understand the powerful and hidden forces behind socio-political movements, I now embark on the journey of decoding the powerful and hidden forces behind individual spiritual development and how it stands in relation to the whole of philosophy. All these years separated between us, two different minds, one great essay concerning love and its relation to the meaning of life. That, that is what this piece of writing is all about.

Of course, I couldn't include every diary entry because a) they are too plentiful and long and b) because there are many that are entirely irrelevant to this essay. I have therefore selected only five of the entries, starting almost from the end of 2021 to mid 2022. In selecting the entries, I continually asked myself, "Does it speak to the philosophical concept of love and/or does it demonstrate the author's complete spiritual transformation?"

I have made only minor typographical edits as needed to ensure grammatical accuracy and a smooth reading experience. But I have laboured strenuously to maintain the integrity of the original pieces. It is from them, after all, that I draw inspiration not only for this essay but also for my new philosophical understanding of love, love not only as a bonding force between people but also as the meaning of life.

The difficulty of my undertaking cannot be underestimated; and, in all likelihood, means I will make many errors on the way. I must not only dabble in classical philosophy but also in aesthetics and, to a lesser degree, analytical philosophy. Additionally, I must remain neutral. Nobody is perfect, not even the author of the journal, and as we are trying to understand his life in reverse, the errors must be brought to the foreground. In other words, complete and absolute vulnerability on my part and on the part of the author of the journal is required.

The task is a big one but, as the French expression goes, *vouloir c'est pouvoir*. And nobody, I swear before God, wants this more than me!

I
THE STARTING POINT

September 20, 2021

Sitting in my room late at night, I stare at the walls.

There are four of them, boxing me in. Many think that this is a place of comfort, fitted with heating and with a warm bed for me to rest in. Alas, illuminated by the light of my bedside lamp, my white walls take on a life of their own. A thousand black dots swim across their surface, like little marionettes pretending to be men. Looking to my right, then to my left, then in front of me I realize: *This is a prison cell.*

I look back down at my desk where my journal lays opened to a blank page, just under my last entry from a month ago. *All that time, I think, with all these thoughts and yet I am unable to write them down on paper?* My right hand is still hovering above the page, pen in hand. *Here goes nothing...*

The walls of my room make me think of a prison cell. But not any prison cell, nay, for it is far more clever than your average prison. It's the sort that only a divine figure could invent, one where you are not only reminded of your physical restrictions (such as not being able to walk anywhere but through the door) but also of your mental restrictions.

I stop. The words have dried up, just like my motivation to finish this entry. You have to do it, you have to; *imagine if some future person picked up your diary and saw this half-written entry... what would they think of you?* I respond to myself: *lazy and incompetent.* Again, another response, clearly in my own voice but from a different source: *That's right; so write!*

A professor and mentor of Nietzsche recommended him for the position of professor before he ever completed his dissertation by saying that his mind knew no bounds. In other words, he could do anything, go anywhere, be anything. I wonder if he ever stared at the walls of his own room late at night, lit by the quivering light of a candle, and thought, "Am I living in a prison?"

Another stop, the pen returns to hovering. My mind goes as blank as a sheet of pristine printer paper. Mesmerized by the white glow I cannot break the trance.

Then, the voice returns with unparalleled force, ending my trance. *Write for fuck sakes! You lack all ability, don't you? You know that you are smarter than anyone you've ever met. You can run intellectual laps around the smartest of your peers and even the smartest of the cotemporary professoriate. Yet you can't write a simple diary entry? You'll amount to nothing at this rate. Write! Write! Write!*

A wince. A tear pours out. Promptly, I wipe it away and write one last paragraph for the night.

The greatest deception ever played on the human race is the idea that one can reach any answer with reason alone. That is not an original phrase but, nevertheless, one that is necessary to repeat from time to time. It's a lie that is

Socratic in nature. Nietzsche was right, you see, to refute Socrates. Socrates, like my inner critic, demands that we seek truth with reason. It seems reasonable enough to assume that. Yet, who here can tell me with confidence, that reason is truth—or, more provocatively, that truth is reason?

1

Early days still, the author had not yet identified love as the bent of his philosophical passions. That said, he had come to two stark realizations. The first was personal in nature: that he was driven by a toxic and destructive inner critic. The second was philosophical: that reason alone is not everything. These are of paramount importance as they lay the foundation for the progression of his philosophy and spiritual growth. It's common knowledge that by coherently formulating the problem you have actually brought yourself halfway to solving the problem. By a) establishing that his own inner critic is untrustworthy and malicious and b) asserting that logic is not sufficient in human affairs, he has started his journey towards the metaphysical and truly philosophical. Hume once said something to the effect that among all his philosophy, a philosopher should still be a man. This, this great realization, is what our author has unwittingly established in logical form.

There were, of course, other entries that predate this one. They go back by about a month. Here is an example of a short entry, dated August 27, 2021:

Today I woke up and felt burdened by some unknown weight. Though I see perfectly, I feel like my vision is bleary. Last night I prayed to God for clarity, I begged him. I'm not religious but I am occasionally brought down to this level, grovelling before the universe! How cruel is He! How cruel is It! Is it not His (or, in the case of the universe, *Its*) fault for how I feel, for what I think and see? He judges me, I can feel it, for being so weak. I'm a beggar to Him! How dare the one who created me like this, who gave me such a terrible predisposition to seeing the bleakness of the world, judge me for it! Adding insult to injury! What a cruel deception...

The entry is an example of all the others from before the transformational one above. It's well-written insofar as it incites emotion in the reader. Who among us hasn't once begged God for something? I promise that even the most militant atheists have had this thought cross their mind at some point in their lives. But it is childish, even in a purely theological sense. God is our Father only to the extent, as Christian doctrine shows us implicitly, that He gave us life. The same holds true for the universe. Life is filled with benediction and iniquity, and it is every individual's choice to choose every moment which path he shall take. To whine incessantly in the way our author does is simply a sign of a true lack of understanding for what life is and what it demands of every person, a sort of selfishness borne up of naivety; he is, at this point, entirely worthy of the divine judgement which he dreads so much.

This entry is also set apart by the prose. Taking on story form, there were none before or none after that were quite as intriguing to my eye. One must imagine that this was a conscious decision in order to help force the words out. If he had tried to express his despair in plain and academic language, he would've certainly failed. Gripped by the despair, the words, as he pointed out, had "dried up" like his "motivation to finish this entry." There exists no enemy as great as a lack of motivation as it cripples one's ability to respond to life, to become who one must be. Yet it is an enemy, which is a good thing, because every enemy can be fought against and ultimately vanquished, even those which are much more powerful than you, if you simply outthink them. Writing this entry in the form of a story is a clear sign of his great intelligence and wit as it demonstrates that his intellect is far stronger than his despair. It breaks through in every word, it dominates the inner critic by representing it instead of letting it control him, and perhaps most importantly it tricks his addled brain into believing that the entry is actually a fun task and not an exhausting philosophical work. The inner critic's patently toxic ambition, so ambitious that it wants to outpace the capabilities of its current host, is laid bare alongside its pathological nature. From hence on, he speaks only once more of his inner critic. "I have come to realize," he said on September 24, 2021:

that I cannot listen to that little voice in my head that has guided me all these years. So demanding is it, so visibly false is its conclusions, and so childish is its actions! With this sea shift in perception, I was able to almost entirely silence that annoying critic in a period of four days, no less. Though it doesn't improve my spiritual state that much, I must say defiantly, proudly, without inhibition: Good riddance!

It isn't that the topic is too tough for him mentally to broach again, it isn't because he is trying to avoid it, but because he simply doesn't need to. How liberating, it must've felt, at the time! Though he had not yet found his wings, he had just uncovered the box in which they were contained.

As regards that blankness of mind, the complete emptiness and silence in his head, which he describes in such painstaking detail. So restless was his mind and spirit, that as a way to weather the storm his conscious mind blocked it out with a comforting white wall, like the ones we so often see in insane asylums. A semblance of peace comes with being in the eye of the storm, even if you know deep in your gut that it's still out there and any moment now it could bear down on your tiny rowboat. But it is exactly that, *a semblance of peace* which must never be confused with real peace of mind. Unfortunately for our author, he is still far away from achieving any real peace of mind—though, I promise, by the end he shall!

His greatest accomplishment thus far lies in allowing the strength of his intellect to scale the thick and uncomely stone wall of despair that blocked him off from experiencing philosophical profundity. He's now on the other side, which led to an evidently more confusing place. Imprisoned by the four walls of his room for so long and to find himself so suddenly thrust into the depths of his inner sanctum, he must've

feared that he had exchanged one prison for another. Instead of Daedalus in the tower he was now the Minotaur.

Alas, he was more like a prisoner who had just escaped a Russian Gulag: he was free, completely free, but a little navigation across the Siberian wasteland was necessary before he could once more be comfortable. Reason would be of no help, because nothing is reasonable or really all that logical in view of an omnibenevolent God or universal force in the Siberian tundra.

It is from this port that our protagonist sets out for his journey, his journey towards—*love*.

II
THE FIRST GLIMMER

October 24, 2021

It's late at night now and I'm coming off what was a one week high. Inasmuch as I am capable of happiness, I was happy. I decided to let loose, to download a dating app, and I met a guy who called me cute and, in all the appropriate ways, courted me. I loved it, absolutely loved it. Then I was supposed to meet with him...^{*} Alas, I suppose not everything is meant to be!

But I do have this journal. There is something bugging me. I am convinced that I must write until it presents itself to me.

Oh, oh, oh,
Here I go:
Up and down, down and up,
Side to side, left to right.

I am an alien in an alien world. That much is certain. I've given this much thought; I've told myself, "Something must be separating you from others, so what is it?" There is a barrier. A barrier of unknown origin.

I must figure out what it is, so that it may no longer remain mysterious. One cannot solve even the simplest of puzzles if there is no night lamp.

Yet in these movements—
These movements of *despair*—
I must take solace, for I can see
A man coming to-wards me!

It's immensely difficult for me to write. I can barely bring myself to write even these simple sentences; the words are drying up, drying, dry—

He wears a smile so infectious
That no simile suffices

^{*} In the journal, the author had difficulty expressing himself. In grief, he crossed out what must've been two or three whole sentences. Unfortunately, he covered them so thoroughly with black ink that not even a single letter remains legible.

And he holds one hand out in my direction!

The dust won't settle. It can't settle. Recently, I have now read the majority of Camus' works, in which I noticed his obsession with the word desert. "Desert this, desert that; we live in a desert; we die in a desert." Yet he always stops short of saying, "Our souls are deserts!"

"*One must imagine Sisyphus happy*"—what is this but a declaration that the only thing that is not a desert is the human spirit? But how, how can he make such a claim if all the preceding premises inevitably lead to the opposite conclusion? Mainly, that nothing *but* the human spirit is a desert.

As he rests his hand over my heart,
He says not a word,
Peeps not a peep,
Pourtant je suis à l'aise...

Yet I believe—nay, I must believe—that he is wrong, categorically so, about the world being a desert, and that all the premises of his complex syllogism do not indeed lead to the ultimate conclusion that the human spirit is a desert, a waste land.

I feel it in my heart... The answer... it's coming to me. It's coming to me, but I cannot find a way to express it in words. But maybe, maybe he can...

Suddenly I realize why I am
So lax
I look into his brown eyes
And only one word comes to mind
LOVE

2

If, dear reader, you believe that something is missing from the preceding passage, your intuition would be correct. There is a lot of subtext that is missing and which you would only get by reading the passages written in the intervening month. Let us take a quick look over these events before proceeding to an analysis of the main passage.

On October 7, 2021 he wrote:

There has been a massive upheaval in my life that I knew would come sooner or later, but which I sought desperately to avoid at all costs. I'm *gay*, a *homosexual*, a *boy* who likes *boys*. Saying that, especially in that way and so earnestly, makes me sick to my stomach. We live in such an accepting age, yet I have this odd feeling about it. I had my life planned out since a young age, wife, children, etc. What will people think of me, I wonder, and how will this change their opinion of me? Conservatives will think I'm mentally ill, liberals that I'm some sort of a hero—both opinions being incorrect extremes [...] Anyways, I finally came out to my friends. My family will have to be next. I fear my grandparents will reject me, cut me off, so I will remain silent for as long as possible on that front. But I have decided finally that, like any person who wishes to be himself and cast off the shackles of despair, depression, anxiety, etc., I must face the music—and there is no better day than today.

This entry is telling in many ways. Upon reading it I was forced to reinterpret everything I had read through a different lens, a lens of deception. Homosexuality is neither an identity nor has any relation to one's identity complex. It is simply a sexual preference. That said, it molds your life in so many ways that it might as well be considered a fundamental element of one's relationship to the world. The people you find attractive, the way your relationships play out, the archetypal relationship between partners is not in line with the majority of the human race. To suppress this is futile; I have many gay friends myself and I have spent a considerable amount of time trying to truly grasp their situation and its effects on their relationship to the world. There is really no choice in being gay, that is, gay in a true sense where you cannot choose to be attracted to a member of the opposite sex. Often my gay friends have told me that they wish they had realized in their youth that no matter how much acceptance and love they had received, they would've still felt like strangers in this world. This feeling fades with time, they assure me, especially for those who go on to find partners who love them unconditionally; yet it exists, exists like a flea on their ass, when they're young.

The author of the journal was experiencing a very common phenomenon where, due to a fundamental psychological and archetypal misalignment with the majority of

the race, he believed himself to be a stranger. Or, as he put it so aptly himself, “an alien in an alien land.” This, of course, doesn’t mean that he really was an alien or even in an alien land, simply that, as he said himself, a “barrier” existed. Though he would attribute this solely to a lack of love, I’d say that throughout the one-year period that the journal covers, there was really two factors, one metaphysical and one psychological in nature, that erected this barrier before him. In a psychological sense, he was being blocked by “the upheaval” of reimagining his life and being different from the majority of the race, an upheaval which, as we see in the passage on October 7, 2022, only worsened his anxiety about others’ judgement. In a metaphysical sense, he was lacking a profound understanding of love, of that force which binds all people and things together; luckily, though, for our protagonist, he just begins to gain a glimmer of the problem.

On October 15, 2022 (about a week after) he writes:

I went for it, I did it, being 18 now I could—I downloaded ██████* I talked to a couple guys, but one in particular swept me off my feet with the wonderful things he said. We messaged and talked, and I am positively energized by the conversations we are having. It was only a week, but I felt like I had known him for the better part of my life... Until suddenly, and with very little notice, he stopped talking to me. I feel naive, like the stupid kid I once was who was always led astray by the smallest and most superficial comments and adages. I cannot believe it. I don’t want to believe. I deleted the app; I’m over this little adventure I had. I can’t make the same mistake Alexander did when faced with the prospect of conquering India or going home. He invaded India, thereby throwing everything away, including (I am convinced) his own life.

We all must keenly remember how powerful and damaging our first love rejection was. Metaphorically speaking, it’s like having a dagger plunged into the heart of your self-esteem, then left there for months to allow for the blood to slowly pour out. But we have to keep two things in mind. Firstly, there is no evidence that the author ever met this guy, keeping the relationship purely online. Secondly, he was already rolling in the depths of despair and self-pity, engulfed by the overwhelming loneliness that that brings while dealing with the realization he was gay. This would have little effect on the metaphysical front—that is, on his understanding of love broadly. But as it concerns the more worldly factor of being in a fundamental psychological and archetypal misalignment with the majority of the race, this incident is actually a traumatic one. It deepens the divide. Now not only is he afraid of being judged by society but he is afraid that he is so different from the whole of humanity that he will never find a partner, a partner that loves him unconditionally. He is thrust again into the depths of anxiety and worry; and thus is his fear confirmed that he is truly “an alien in an alien world.”

* He covered the name of the app in such thick loops of ink that I couldn’t make it out. The app in question, however, is irrelevant. He probably felt it too personal on some level to say the app’s name; that it would give too clear an image to his reader of what his interactions actually looked like. Back then, there was a word used perhaps too often (as internet literature from the time shows), cringy, that most likely describes how he felt leaving the name of the app on full display for posterity.

It is also easy to forget the political atmosphere of the time as it is now so long ago; yet it was ultimately very important in determining his mental state. The generation growing up in 2021-2022 faced a pandemic, inflation, break down of the social order, and a radical shift in social institutions. Our protagonist was graduating in those turbulent years, as he states in his journal several times, and heading off to university. There are really only a couple points in one's life that are assured to be turning points, and the grade 12 year leading up to graduation is one of them as it forces one to act more like an adult or, quite simply put, fail. Liberalism had seized all the institutions that were then in free fall and conservatism flew overhead like a vulture. For a gay person, there was little outward discrimination as the historical record will show; nevertheless, it was difficult. In one journal entry our protagonist summed up the political atmosphere nicely, or so it would seem when we glean the historical record. "Humans have a similar curse to King Midas," he wrote on January 27, 2022,

the man who turned everything he touched to gold—except instead of turning things to gold, we politicize whatever we lay our hands on. Even such things as our gender identities and sexual proclivities have been turned political, and we have all been forced to take sides one way or the other. We live in a society that declares if you are not with us, you are against us, and on either side lay armies waiting to draw the blood of traitors.

The two opposing armies were mighty at the time, and our protagonist was stuck right between them. His family was "divided between liberal and conservative with a lot of illogical overlap." His grandparents "almost certainly wouldn't accept" him while his parents "would do so but would never *understand*." So, our protagonist found himself in the hinterland of the greatest political debates of his time around gender and identity. Rarely does he talk about this, but there is a little glimmer that comes through in one entry near the end of his time writing in the journal. "If I side with the more traditionalist elements of the ongoing political battle, I am very likely hurting my own interests (that is, my want and right to be myself unabashedly) in the long term. Yet, yet if I side with the 'liberals' I am most certainly (there is little debate about this in my mind) signing away the same right. Perhaps I share the same fate as James Wood: to sound like an atheist when talking to the religious and like a deeply religious man when talking to the atheists!"

So there are multiple points of view from which this dilemma of the "barrier of unknown origin" separating him from "the world" can be interpreted; and all of them bear some relevance on his emotional state. It bears remembering that, in philosophy, how the problem is solved is always more important than either any particular detail or answer. He will solve this problem, and we will analyze how he managed it, but for now he will have to suffer through being "an alien in an alien world."

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In the previous entry the author was forced to use story as a way to express himself, and in so doing he was able to conquer his inner critic. Yet here the problem is different because it relates entirely to the metaphysical, not the psychological. Therefore, in this

entry he uses poetry to tease out and decode the message he felt he was meant to receive. He spent days brooding on it, even declaring shortly before this entry, “I am on to something, I’m sure of it, but I am not quite sure what it is. I must change something up and see if it allows me the breakthrough I require!”

There is an oft-recited parable of Sun Tzu. He was called to the emperor of Wu’s court, where he was asked by the emperor to submit his military theory to a little test. Of course, he accepted. Offered some concubines to play as his soldiers, he divided them into groups of roughly 180, placing at each group’s head one of the emperor’s favourite concubines. He gave them specific commands, to which they at first failed. Indeed, the girls giggled at him. Master Sun knew that if at first the army didn’t obey, it should be presumed the fault of the general for not being clear enough. He redoubled his efforts, reexplained to the girls what they had to do. Again, they failed him. He then stated that if the orders are clear and the soldiers nonetheless disobey it is the fault of the commanders. He ordered that the two concubines be decapitated—and despite the emperor sending a message to him requesting him to stop—he had the dirty act done. Supposedly, or so goes the tale, the girls executed every one of his commands perfectly from then on—never daring, not even once, to let a giggle slip from between their lips.

This story has great significance in the life of our author, though he never mentioned it once in the journal. This is the sort of breakthrough he was longing for, the sort that leads to a victory so absolute as to bring all elements of oneself and one’s consciousness into order—the metaphysical judge’s gavel. Such a breakthrough was now within his grasp thanks to his poetic abilities. His mind was blank, the words drying up, yet his mind was able to eloquently tell him:

Suddenly I realize why I am
So lax
I look into his brown eyes
And only one word comes to mind
LOVE

Love, yes, *love* indeed is the only thing that could have such an effect. The man must have appeared all important to him, especially in the context of losing his prospective partner to the clutches of fate. One could speculate as to whether this brown-eyed man was the guy he had lost, but one could speculate on almost anything and he would still find himself just as unwise as before. Just look at poor Schopenhauer! That he did not state who this man was either directly or indirectly throughout the whole journal indicates that he himself did not give much attention to this question. He understood this man to be love himself, to be the embodiment of the concept and not the embodiment of a person.

The introduction of Camus in the prose is interesting, but it does give greater meaning to the poem itself. Camus speaks often of “the desert,” to which no person has ever yet been able to attach a specific meaning; though it is clear enough. The meaning lies in the world of existential philosophy, in the concept of thrownness and absurdity. The world is perfectly absurd and thus devoid of any inherent meaning, which is to say that we must create meaning ourselves. This is the desert, a space of complete ambiguity where everyone is restlessly trying to build their own little sand dunes. This is of course a clever way of saying that even if we live in a desert, and the very act of trying to build

our own little sand dunes is absurd, that we are still living, willing creatures, that the only thing which is not made of sand is our own soul.

It is unclear what the author means by Camus' "complex syllogism" which he attributes to the conclusion that everything, including the human spirit, is a desert. Anyone who has done even a brief review of existentialism will, of course, have observed the sort of error in logic that Camus invokes with his analogy to the desert; and it is this logical fallacy which the author is most likely referencing and pushing back against. If a) we live in a world with no inherent meaning and b) our act of trying to find meaning is absurd as well as the world itself, how can we then reach conclusion c) that, despite all that, the human spirit is really something special? The author of this text is a self-declared behaviourist,* and so he invariably views the building of the sand dune as a direct expression of the human being's soul. If the most fundamental expression of something is absurd and meaningless, how can that thing not be also?

Our author has been trapped in an existential way of being for far too long, a way of being that obviously conflicts with his philosophical orientation at its most basic levels. It is because of this disagreement between action and mind that he goes "*Up and down, down and up/ side to side, left to right.*" By officially repudiating himself from Camus' philosophy and expressing himself poetically, he has finally made a breakthrough. He navigated through the thickest part of the forest and into the open tundra of Siberia. He can now go anywhere. There is still a treacherous road ahead of him towards peace and comfort, he is all too keenly aware—but at any rate he is now freer than ever, his spirit as expansive as the landscape laid before him. When he closes his eyes, all his soldiers, all his commanders follow his orders perfectly at the drop of a dime. "Mobilize men," he says, "mobilize at once and prepare for battle!" and to his surprise (for it is the first time in his life such a thing has happened) not a single one laughs nor sneers nor taunts. Instead, they obey. Though he is not yet aware that to garner immediate obedience of the sort he now enjoys one must first have surrendered something valuable. There are no skeletons in his closet, but there are most definitely two concubines' heads!

* On February 8, 2022 he wrote: "I have come to the conclusion I'm a behaviourist. What one acts out, how one lives, how one is in the world takes precedent over weak and flimsy words."

III REVELATION

January 20, 2022

For slightly more than a couple months now I've been trying to discern the meaning of the poem I wrote in my entry on October 7. I am indeed starved of love in a certain sense. For example, I've never had a loving boyfriend, someone who would be there for certain through thick and thin. Everyone who I've hit it off with or had a crush on departed my life almost as quickly as he came. It haunted me, that word, *love*, since I first wrote it into the poem. It is for that reason and that reason alone I avoided speaking of it over the last couple months. I felt like a little kid again hiding my head under the blankets at night thinking that the thin cloth over my eyes would stop the monsters from getting me.

Alas! it is precisely because I am scared of it that I must confront it, this word, this concept, *love*.

Imagine this, a silence so deep that it feels like there is a bubble forming in and around your eardrums. So deep, *yes*, so deep is this silence that you swear you can hear every quantum particle in the immediate vicinity come into and out of existence. Your mind conjures endless pictures of mundane things to keep you occupied; anything, after all, is better than the silence! This is the life I've lived without pause for more than a year, irrespective of where I was or who I was with. Since my youth I have had periods like this. I usually got a moment of respite every couple months—but for slightly over a year now I've been stewing in my very own bell jar. I'd like to say at least that I was able to meet Ms. Plath while here but, alas, that is the nature of a bell jar, that you are entirely alone.

Writing this is even difficult, and I'm the same boy who once wrote seven-thousand-word essays in two days for fun!

Depression, that's what my age would say I have. *Depression*. This word has a very basic etymological basis, coming from the latin *deprimere*, meaning to press down. An apt descriptor—as I am sure anyone who has ever suffered from depression will tell you—but in my case I have always, even in my darkest days, even in the days where I find myself on the brink of tears on some bench downtown, maintained that there was hope for myself, hope of escape.

I now believe that this hope must be found somewhere in the word “love.”

When I am in my bell jar cut off from the whole of the planet in that deafening silence, I am numb. Yet there is one feeling that I can still acutely feel, *loneliness*. Since about six or so months ago, since that fated moment,* I have been incapacitated by loneliness, constantly, unremittingly, almost uncontrollably demanding God: “Where, where is *my love*?”

I want a partner, a confidant, a lover. Saying that out loud sounds so repugnant and lame, like Sisyphus' cries as he pushes the rock of the hill—but I suppose, *en réalité*, it is only natural. Given the circumstances, I must be suffering from an almost complete

* He is referencing the moment where he finally admitted to himself and his friends that he was a homosexual.

lack of oxytocin. I see now the reason why Vonnegut focused as much as he did on the concept of chemical imbalances...

But what about the transcendental, the metaphysical?

I've always known that Christian doctrine teaches that God loves all people for they are His children. It wasn't until recently, however, while paying the concept of love some serious attention that I realized just how profound a theological statement that is.

I am still very much in the grips of this silence, this depression as the psychologists say. The only reason I can write this much this coherently is because I'm in a slight upswing, but I'm sure that I will soon, like on a roller coaster, come crashing down towards the earth.

Never have I been religious, despite always using religious expressions, themes, and words in my writing. But in my darkest days I took up praying to God, asking him for forgiveness, grace, blah, blah, blah, etc., etc., etc. In retrospect now I see just how whiny I sounded. I'm so young with presumably so much ahead of me—and there I was, like a five-year-old boy in a booster seat, nagging my Father, saying, "Are we there yet?"

So, I've stopped that entirely, rather thanking him for everything He's given me, acknowledging that beyond existence itself He cannot give me anything else. He has (in theory) endowed me the greatest gift of all, that is, existence against all odds. It would be me, if anyone, who owes Him something. Yet I know we're even because, after all, the Lord loves us all as His children...

The more I write the more lost I become. I will try to conclude my thoughts. Something about the way I feel, about this deafening silence, has to do with the concept of love. However, I have yet to discern exactly what about it is thrashing me so violently about the great sea of life. It might be entirely related to having never been in a relationship and the resulting chemical imbalance therefrom... But I refuse to believe that that is the whole picture, even if it is a piece. The whole world, every creature and man and insect and tree, is a piece of a puzzle. As if one can solve a puzzle with only one piece!

If I grow frustrated during my proceeding deliberations, I will do my best to remember the following poem:

*As he turned he caught the feeling,
And he smiled as he walked down the road.
All my days, they are filled with meaning,
But I have yet to fathom the code.*

SANDY DENNY, *The Optimist*

3

The author has a revelation in this passage. Like the letter H in French, it is silent, almost invisible, yet still there. And just like a vowel, it is present in every word, every sentence, every paragraph of the entry with no real place to call home. One couldn't point to a specific part and say, "Aha! the genius of this boy lies in..."

No revelation comes about instantaneously. This might sound like the opposite of the truth, almost oxymoronic, but it is true that nobody has ever had a revelation without at least some previous brooding. A realization may come on suddenly, but a revelation is akin to a great pilgrimage that you only reach after much struggle and many blisters. This entry must be conceived thus—that is, as a pilgrimage. It contains two stops on the way, and it looks something like this:

...

1) The Bell Jar Reference and The Infinite.

The concept of the bell jar is most peculiar as it is clearly derived from Sylvia Plath's novel, *The Bell Jar*, in which she analogizes severe mental illness to stewing in one's own juices inside a bell jar. The author of the journal was clever in his introduction of "Ms. Plath," so clever that if you blinked you would've missed it. It might have been a subconscious act of the will, the author then being nothing but a servant of his own mind. But he is far too intelligent a person for that. After mentioning that he inhabits his own bell jar, he says something to the effect that he wishes he could at least say he met Ms. Plath while there but that, unfortunately, the nature of the bell jar is such that he is alone.

This is a boy enamoured of historical figures of different times and pursuits. Besides the already mentioned philosophers, there are references scattered throughout the journal to figures such as (but not limited to) Caesar, Napoleon, Vercingetorix, Emil Cioran, Ceausescu, Stalin, Hitler, and Churchill. More than well-read, he was also a learned scholar of antiquity. He always felt a special connection to history:

December 20, 2022

Since grade 3 I have had a particular interest in history and historical figures. Since then, I have always viewed everything through a historical lens. Many will call me insane, but I feel like it is more than simply a study of history for me; I

can feel history in my veins, I am it and it is me. When I speak of Caesar, I see myself there in the senate the day he was murdered, watching in consternation. More than anyone, I understand history and its lessons; my gift is perhaps this, that my passion should be philosophy while my orientation is essentially one of a historian.

The author would never lightly bandy about references to historical figures because it is not simply that he knows or even understands the reference but that he believes himself to *be* the reference. When he speaks of Sylvia Plath, he sees himself there with her for the countless hours of suffering, just as, when he speaks of World War One, he sees himself right down in the trenches cursing God. There is thus a great meaning to his invocation of Sylvia Plath and her novel *The Bell Jar*.

The kinship he had with historical figures left him wallowing in self-pity. "I know many people in this life but none of them are as great as the ones who existed in the past; and although I know them, I can never actually meet them." Sylvia Plath is a representation of his deepest wish to experience the whole of history, to decouple himself from his feeble and sickly body and escape to a higher realm where he can be everywhere at once, meet everyone and do everything. His esoteric knowledge is really in service to the higher, more universal human aspiration of becoming God Himself.

Kierkegaard was right to say that man is a synthesis of the infinite and the finite. Nobody wished to experience the infinite more than our poor author, who strove for it every second of every day. "The infinite is where I belong, *pas ici*." Sylvia Plath was but the perfect symbol for both his noble attempt to be at one with the infinite and his very human despair of not quite ever being able to do it.

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2) Christian Doctrine and Theology.

The author was introduced to Christian doctrine and theology via Kierkegaard's writings. This is an established fact. "Kierkegaard is my philosophical hero, and as I pour over his writings," he wrote at one point,

I continue to learn miraculous things. A whole new world of religious thought (though I maintain my agnostic, even atheist stance) has been opened up to me. When I think of Kierkegaard, I see him with a cane in hand, tall and proud but slightly bent over, treading down a path, breathing in the refreshing Nordic air [...] And I cannot help but feel a kinship with him greater than any person because he is just so serene and wise.

The author was introduced to Kierkegaard, it was established in the same entry, sometime before the writing of this journal by the book *The Present Age*. “I understood nothing, but I was captivated. After that book I thought: ‘Perhaps I should read more’; and read more I did!” His admiration for Kierkegaard through most of his journal borders on inane and cultish.* This is an intriguing position to start from if you’re interested in Christian doctrine as there was no orthodox figure who was, paradoxically, as unorthodox as Kierkegaard.

It is probably very true that he knew, even before Kierkegaard, that Christian doctrine teaches that God loves all people. Even today, years later and after a complete revision of the social structure where Christianity holds even less authority, it is common knowledge that this was at the bedrock of Christian doctrine. And it is indeed a profound theological statement, one that is not often rivalled in the historical record. If we can accept the concept of God more broadly (that is, more as a metaphor to something greater), the statement could also be said to be of unparalleled philosophical profundity. The interesting thing about this passage is therefore not that he knew this fact, but that he used the word “silence” in relation to Christian doctrine and theology. The word may be used by other theologians, but this is a remarkably Kierkegaardian inclusion.

Silence apparently is the equivalent of depression, or so says the author. But this seems to contradict everything else he ever said, particularly about depression being a force that “pushes down” on the soul. Yes, he mentions the silence as a symptom of depression, which is natural because if one were pushed into the dirt, one also would find one’s ears clogged by dirt. But silence as depression? this is not said until now. The only way to make sense of it is to interpret this discussion as theological and the rest as philosophical and scientific. In a “transcendental, metaphysical” sense silence must be the equivalent of depression because it strikes at the heart of the famous question “to be or not to be...” If there exists a soul that cannot express itself, then it must naturally be in a state of depression or despair. What is a soul but energy, a longing, a striving, *consciousness*, and what is the primary point of all the aforementioned qualities but to be expressed? If a king chose a painter, and let’s say his only real task in life, his *raison d’être*, his only way to truly have himself heard was to paint, and had his hands cut off—would this not shatter him as a person, make him in other words depressed? The reason is this, that you have taken from him his soul’s sole way of making itself heard in the world. The only way now to make him even more of a shell of his former self would be to have his tongue cut out.

Bent before the edge of his bead, praying endlessly for his “love” and countless other things, what he was really asking for was this: *to be heard and listened to*. Really, if one thinks about it, the only reason ever to pray to God would be to ask for some way to have one’s soul to be heard and listened to by others. His mind turned and turned,

* This reverence for Kierkegaard did force me (a man naturally inclined to modern German philosophy) to do my research on the man, something which must show through in my own exposition. I must admit, however, though I do not share the same hankering for Kierkegaard’s philosophy, of all the people for a young person to follow in this way you could not pick better than Kierkegaard. He’s better than any religious or philosophical figure, so long as you do as he says and not as he did.

churning out desire after desire, wish after wish, impulse after impulse—or in other words, *demand after demand*. Unable to fulfill these orders himself, he turned to God at night (despite himself being an agnostic) in desperate hope that He would do what he could not. But then one day, possibly while lying in bed, he looked up at the roof of his prison and saw it from an entirely different angle. He saw through the roof in his mind's eye, saw the stars above him, and beyond the stars the universe teeming with life and beauty, so much greater than him that he was not even a speck in comparison. He thought:

“I am so small and so puny compared to all that, the odds of my existence are so infinitesimal... and here I am moping about. If there were a God He would have given as His greatest gift *life*. There is nothing greater for it contains *everything*. He would then have left the rest to us.” Then he closed his eyes, forced his yappy mind into temporary silence, allowed the true magnitude of the realization to wash over him, before finally saying for the first time: “Thank you, God. Thank you for everything...”

• • •

3) The Revelation Itself

The revelation is this: that one cannot have a direct relationship with historical figures, but one can come to a sort of understanding with the universe. The infinite, the eternal, does not exist in relation to the human species but in relation to all things, and the universe is much, much greater. Emil Cioran believed that the only real way to enrich oneself was by frequenting other disciplines that are not in one's own forte. The same holds true for the spiritual pursuit of self-understanding: to enrich our understanding of humankind, we must expand our awareness beyond Earth, beyond the essentially human.

That is why he could lie in bed and see himself in perspective, that is, as a minor piece of a greater structure, and yet he wasn't crushed. He saw the universe for what it was and not what he wanted it to be, thus silencing the needy little voice in his head that brought him so much discomfort. The disquieting silence of the night became a warm embrace, and the prison walls that contained him for so long became nothing more than walls, fallible and breakable like himself.

This may appear tangential, but it is a key part of his journey. After mastering himself, after getting all the parts of his mind to march as one, he had to garner their respect and admiration. He had done that. Now it was a matter of finding the concubines' heads that are hidden in his closet so he can become his greatest possible self. He had now only to make the subconscious conscious.

• • •

The snowstorm clouded his vision, the flakes of snow so thick and impenetrable. They formed a ridge along his brow and caked his clothing. Yet he powered on, clutching his stomach to keep himself warm. He decides to risk it, looks up into the thicket of snow. Weary, snow-caked concrete in the distance stretching towards the sky. Glittering panes of glass. Could it be so? He closes his eyes. “Men, keep marching, marching, marching! —soon victory shall be ours!”

“Yessir!”

**IV
COMING TO**

March 1, 2022

This month, I hit such a low point and so much was going on, that I was forced to take a moment to simply reflect. *Pardonnez-moi, Seigneur, d'avoir fait tant de bêtises durant toutes ces années.*

I finally found someone who likes me, who genuinely likes me, romantically. Not someone who is trying to use me, not someone who desperately needs me—no, someone who simply enjoys being with me. In an instant my entire life changed, my entire life view altered. No longer do mendacious monsters threaten me from the shadows; in fact, the shadows appear to me now only to be places I have not yet explored, that is, new opportunities. If I close my eyes, I can now see a valley bathed in sunlight where before I saw a forest, a forest thick with fog.

Love was the simple ingredient I needed. It is not merely the affection from this individual, though, or even love from this individual either. It is so much more. Many assume that their relationship with a significant-other lifts them up emotionally because of the resulting chemical cocktail that your electro-chemical brain organ is prompted to serve you. This, however, is a very basic and *facie prime* way to understand the phenomenon.

Since the first person awoke to find himself conscious, humanity has been trying to solve the problem of what makes a good life. Socrates thinks a good life is one in which everything is questioned. Nietzsche believes the good life is full of life-affirming struggle. Kierkegaard believes a good life is one lived as a true Christian before God. The problem inherent in all these men's conceptions—and this is not an exhaustive list of examples—is that they are not really speaking about a good life but about a meaningful one. All of them would agree with the following premises:

- 1) Life is a struggle;
- 2) There are highs and lows in life, tragedy and glory; and
- 3) life is essentially absurd.

Not only do they agree with the preceding truisms, they *presuppose* them in every instant throughout their works. It is embedded into the very framework of their thinking. Whether they ever uttered or wrote them down themselves is irrelevant. Socrates, had he not believed these premises to be self-evident, would never have faced the prospect of death with such calmness of soul. Had Nietzsche not believed them, he would've allowed his many illnesses to guide him silently like the lamb to the slaughter. And Kierkegaard, well, he would have simply married Regine Olsen and become a father and a learned scholar. Good for them, I say. But the assumption that what they were aiming for was the good life is patently untrue. Meaning took precedence.

I, too, maintain that the preceding premises are correct, so correct in fact one could easily call them truisms. To me as well, meaning is almost all-important as it is what gives the basis for a truly learned and profound understanding of reality. I've met many people for whom meaning is the least of their concerns, and they live day by day, week by week, month by month, year by year until finally death comes knocking at the door. It's fine by me that they live in this way; indeed, it is their right to do so. Yet they

are often very boring and two-dimensional characters, the sort of people I wouldn't readily invite to my dinner parties or into my own home.

The good life, however, requires moderation. Nothing about the major religious or philosophical characters in the whole of human history portrays moderation. Even Buddha was an extremist. The only factor missing from the world view of Socrates, Nietzsche, and Kierkegaard (as our examples) is love. I am obliged to add to the three premises with a fourth:

4) That *love is everything*.

This love is all encompassing. The only thing that unites us all, I now see, is love. Even when we are at war, when one tribe is decapitating the king of another tribe, there exists a bond between all the people involved, a bond forged in love. I apologize to Foucault, one of the great philosophical tricksters of the twenty-first century, but society is not infused with capillaries of power but, rather, capillaries of love.

This, of course, leaves much specificity to be desired. I am still unsure of how long this upswing will last, or if in a week's time I'll be tearing this entry out and burning it in a fit of rage towards my naive younger self. My heart tells me that this won't happen, that I've finally struck upon the answer to all my qualms—or, at the very least, that I've started trekking down the right path.

Nonetheless, precedent tells me otherwise.

4

I

The Refutation of the Socratic

And so the first concubine's head reveals itself, and it is no other than Socrates himself!

The "good life," the "meaningful life" are terms that have for so long dominated philosophy, particularly metaphysics. These canonical questions have always plagued mankind since its conception; all the proofs to this effect can be found in religious doctrines, including the pagan one of ancient Greece. The warring of the gods was really a dialectical argument over the best possible of worlds. It's for that reason that we still read the Iliad; if it were merely out of some nostalgia for ancient Greece it would've worn out about a thousand years ago, if not a thousand and five hundred!

However, it was Socrates who brought this question into the realm of philosophy. It's a curious fact of history that Sam Harris could never even try to define the good life scientifically if Socrates, a pagan who had an inner voice, a daemon, had not founded the logical framework by which to do so. Our author already established that reason is not sufficient in human affairs, particularly in the domain of human thought. This premise is found throughout the author's entries, though it is only explicitly stated once in a rather drab part of the journal: "Dostoevsky's sole accomplishment was divining where rationality begins and where it ends, and yet paradoxically he was never quite able to show that rationality has boundaries because, after all, one would require rationality to show such a thing definitively."

Socrates would be the first to admit that reason has limits. Many scholars and philosophers would note that the ancient Greeks above all strove for a purely logical, intelligible understanding of the universe. From the ancient Greeks, we have many (now antiquated) theories of physical reality that were all founded on the idea of there being a handful of fundamental properties from which all things are made. For example, Aristotle's theory devised of all matter being comprised of four elements: earth, air, fire, and water, which all functioned according to "purposive" forces. Though differing from philosopher to philosopher, this is the sort of thought that dominated pre- and post-Socratic Greek thought. In fact, the same scholars would note, such a striving for a purely intelligible, reasonable understanding of the universe only increased in intensity in post-Socratic Greece. But this is not because of Socrates but because of a misinterpretation of Socrates, the belief that he was serious and that his logical dialectic was unironic. If interpreted as an ironist, as so many of modernity's philosophers rightly have, it is obvious that Socrates would be the first to admit, "There are limits to reason!"

But as with everything to do with Socrates, it is not what he believes so much as how he expresses his belief that causes problems. By giving a philosophical foundation to the good or meaningful life he was, in effect, bringing it from the theological realm into the intellectual realm. This is something he did quite often, which is why he was eventually charged with blasphemy and corrupting the youth of Athens. Socrates lived under the impression that like all people he would die and then melt away into obscurity, and so he did not painstakingly try, as modern philosophers do, to clearly express himself—or, really, express himself at all since he never wrote a thing. Socrates, unlike every proceeding philosopher (and unlike our author), did not live under the specter of posterity; he was himself, *that single individual*. When he spoke of the “good life,” it can easily be imagined, that he never dreamed it would be interpreted in such a literal sense, that there would ever be hordes of philosophers trying to discover the meaning of life, trying to discern how to live in this topsy-turvy, ambiguous world by using his dialectic. The very notion of his dialectical method being used as a way to find meaning would’ve appeared rather silly to him; after all, it is from this method that he rendered himself the wisest man in Greece because, as the Oracle said, “He knew he knew nothing.”

Our author uses the examples of Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, and Socrates but for the historical reasons adumbrated above, the butt of his critique was really aimed at Socrates. Although it could be said that the critique is pointed more at his followers who misunderstood his teachings, it is still Socrates who is at the heart of the problem. Almost every branch of philosophy can be traced back to Socrates, even in the modern world where we like to pretend that we’re so much more advanced. But existentialism, that field of philosophy which simply tries to deal with the human condition, is directly linked to the Socratic dialectic. Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, and their ilk came to their conclusions maieutically, whether in dialogue with themselves or others. By rejecting the notion developed by Socrates, Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, and the like of the good or meaningful life the author has attacked the very core of the existential branch of Socratic thought.

He has cut himself free of the chains of Socratic thought, cut himself free of the burden of having to live up to the expectations that all the different philosophers in that field have set. Socrates will always be there for him when he wants a moment of divine humbleness, to know that he knows nothing. Socrates will always be there for our protagonist when he needs some ancient wisdom. But he is on his own trip, and he cannot allow Socrates to mingle freely among his soldiers in the unbridled manner as he had previously.

“Guards, off with his head!”

II The Three Premises

Our author is perspicacious enough to see through all the cant to the four major premises that undergird the philosophy of every major philosopher known to

humankind. These four premises are, however, far more complex than any single point, a fact which our protagonist was definitely aware of, though the scope to which the peculiarities of these premises would affect his spiritual development would catch him unawares. "I am shocked, shocked the more I think of it just how complex the premises are, and yet how simply beautiful they are!"

Absurdity, though not a well-formulated philosophy in the time of Socrates, comes through in every rendition made of him, and since its inception has not disappeared. The dark ages were an attempt, it could be said from an historic-philosophical viewpoint, to return to a pre-Socratic age. When the church ordered the burnings of its opponents, when kings repressed thinkers, they did so in the name of the Lord (after all, a king was but the appointee of God). The war between religion and philosophy has only really existed in its modern form since Socrates, and this war is better conceived as a war between those who want to struggle against absurdity and those who want to embrace it. During the whole medieval ages, those one thousand years, there was a sort of spiritual certainty in Europe. If ancient Greece was the childhood stage of Occidental civilization, acquiring knowledge and getting a grip on its place in the world, the medieval age was the rebellious age, a rebellion not so much against Rome but against Socrates' uncertainty that had allowed it to develop so wonderfully. Uncertainty is, of course, the natural antecedent of absurdity. And once uncertainty has been introduced, there is no turning back. If Socratic thought is a sort of evil, as Nietzsche thought, then unfortunately the whole of society is suffering from a terminal illness. The whole landscape altered, absurdity's existence recognized. The best definition of truth is this: that which is seen cannot be unseen; therefore, to suppress it is a dangerous and childish naivety, a species of authoritarian sophistry that could only end terribly, like with the bubonic plague.*

That there are ups and downs, highs and lows, in life is a fact that rarely needs an appeal to anything greater than personal experience. If you are a human, you know that this is the truth. At this premise, we depart the essentially Socratic in order to move towards the essentially human. The philosophical nuance of the claim lies in exactly that, its universality. When we read a novel, especially a well-written one, with all its ebbs and flows, we feel perfectly engaged in it as we sense that we are gaining some sort of wisdom. But it is not so much wisdom as our conscious being imbibed by the archetypal struggle that defines life.

The idea of struggle as being inherent in life was a premise that went without saying until very recently, where we have technology advanced enough to reduce or entirely blunt our worldly struggles. Struggle still inheres, of course; it has just found different forms to take, all the forms of which would be tedious to list. All living things know struggle. Nietzsche was not alone in being a sick man, Kierkegaard in being a mentally-ill man. It is not because they were ill-bred that they struggled but because

* This analogy is not intended to insinuate that the bubonic plague came about as a result of this metaphysical war. No, that would be a palpably absurd claim, unscientific and even unphilosophical. Rather it is a statement of fact that to put an end to a delusion as grand as the possibility of reverting to a pre-Socratic Europe required a tragedy of that scale, a tragedy that outweighs any singular tragedy brought about by rebelling against one's own spirit.

they were human. Emil Cioran blames *birth* itself as the beginning of tragedy. It is, according to him, not so much that we run from the tragedy of death but that we run from the tragedy of our birth. Even to the most optimistic, mentally-healthy person this is a logical proposition. “When we exist, death is not; and when death exists, we are not,” after all, how can one flee from that which is not? Nietzsche wanted to overcome his suffering, not by numbing it as our age tries to, but by making his will stronger than the suffering. Kierkegaard, on the other hand, embraced his suffering as a gift from God. These are two diametrically opposed ways of trying to flee from the tragedy of one’s *birth*, of one’s *life*. Our protagonist is smart enough to see that neither worked, not because the methods failed to end the suffering but because neither succeeded at bringing the men peace. Freed from the ridged existential-Socratic doctrine, the author was able, for the first time, to muster the maieutic skill set to his own benefit and ask, “Hm, are you so sure Herr Nietzsche, are you so sure about that Hr Kierkegaard?”

As always, it is a well-placed question that reveals all and ends even the most powerful of eras.

III

That Everything is About Love!

He had showed he was greater than Socrates’ irony, a step which, ironically, allowed him to master Socratic irony. It is with this mastery that he can assert: “That love is everything.” The Christians will say that this is unoriginal, protest that they should have credit for this premise. To the established church, a response can be given thus: “That once you live out the premise, once you show to us that you truly believe it, believe that God *loves all*, then we will listen.” To those individuals who have already done this subjective work, it bears remembering that our author is not a Christian but a philosopher in a long line of thinkers dating back to ancient Greece and Rome. He swears no allegiance to the pagans or the Christians, the Muslims or the Hindus, because he is really *that individual* in the same way Socrates was. This is a unique premise in his field, and so it is truly the work of a radical genius to include it.

This is a sign that he is finally *coming to*, coming to the realization that love is the unifying force of every man, woman, and beast, coming to his final spiritual transfiguration. He had already in place all the philosophical knowledge he needed, deep down. Whether he realized it, he knew where he was headed and what he had to do. But it was finding this guy, this “someone who likes” him, “who genuinely likes” him, “romantically,” that threw him suddenly into the last leg of his journey. The essential quality was that this man was the first person who was clearly not trying to use him but, rather, simply wanted to be with him. For someone in a total state of despair and depression, there can be no more powerful figure. Yet this character grows weaker because, as it brings our protagonist out of the depths of despair, it begins to act more like a portal into another realm of thought, a portal to a true understanding of *love*, than as a daunting figure.

At once our protagonist is aware of all the happy couples on the streets, in the cafes, in the malls. He sees all about him friends sharing smiles, laughter, stories. And between all these people—even the ones on the outskirts, despairing like him—he can feel a connection forged in caring, in love. The author himself would write a couple days later: “Kierkegaard said that we are all connected by passion; and I believed him wholeheartedly from the start. And what is love but the greatest passion? Everything must indeed be love.” He went on:

To love thy neighbor, thy coworker, thy friend: this is the point of it all. Love comes in many forms, either for other people or for things, but it is what unites us all. When we hate, it is because we are rejecting love; an act which, though in the moment is very successful, in the long term is as futile as a buffalo taking on an elephant. Love reveals, hate hides, love transfigures, hate holds us down. Love is universal, hate worldly and individual.

He has not quite reached where he has to be. One recovers from despair as one recovers from the flu, shortly and in stages. What is needed now is a bit more reflection, the finding of the final concubine’s head, and most importantly—*time*.

IV ***Bon Voyage!***

The flakes of snow begin to dissipate, the storm approaching its end. He survived, he survived! He looks up again: it had not been a mirage, there was a city even if it was some ways now. He stops for a long moment. The sun reflects off the snow, burning his eyes—yet he maintains his gaze through squinted eyes. Austere concrete buildings protrude from the earth, reaching for the sky. People—are those people, those specks, or vehicles? —move around at their base. He knows they can’t see him yet, not because they are incapable of it but because they won’t be looking; he’s as good as invisible to them. But he would arrive soon.

He closes his eyes. “Men, we’re almost there. Have knowledge of this. And never cease to admire yourself for this great accomplishment, to love yourselves for it. Every time you’re ill, every time you’re feeling down in the gutter, remember this success, remember the love.”

To his absolute shock there was a response: “Yessir!”

V
TRANSCENDENCE

September 21, 2022

So many months have passed since I first wrote that poem, the poem of the unknown man who conjured in my head for the first time the notion of love. So many months have passed now since I declared that love must be a necessary component of a good life though I still didn't have all the answers. In those months the bell jar has lifted, slowly but surely; as the weary boy I was, I came unto Jesus, and true to His word He gave me rest. The guy who liked me is fading out of my life, but for the first time I am at ease for I know that another one will come—and some day I'll have one partner *jusqu'à la mort*. Nay, it is more than knowing, it is *believing*.

I now see it so clearly. The love he gave me was but a portal. The portal leading me, of course, to a much greater metaphysical form of love, the one that exists beyond the chemical cocktail our brains create. Both are important, the biological and the metaphysical, because without the former we could never be aware of the latter. Although that doesn't mean, as the radical empiricists of our age would claim, that the latter doesn't exist.

When I look out on a landscape, particularly the ones we have in British Columbia, great and expansive, birds in the air and lilies in the field just as they should be, I am entranced by the beauty. This is a universal experience. Many call it "beauty"—or at any rate most philosophers call it beauty. I can no longer in good faith do the same. I must call it "love."

I also now reject every previous philosopher's striving for a meaningful life since, almost all of them, failed first to recognize that you can have no meaning without love. Kierkegaard above all forgot this. Though he still remains one of the greatest thinkers of all time and one of my idols, the notion that he managed to transfigure himself onto a greater, religious plain of existence is simply not true. He never allowed himself to be embraced wholly by love.

Reading Clare Carlisle's biography *The Restless Life of Soren Kierkegaard* was what finally brought me to this realization. Kierkegaard was in a constant state of anxiety, of ups and downs precipitated by essentially Yes or No questions. "Should I publish? Should I be a writer? Should I marry Regine?" He recognized this himself, always asking why it was that he could never manage to find the peace he so desired. One can easily picture him in the Church of the Lady gazing upon the statue of Christ with the inscription "Come Unto Me," pleading silently: "Please, O Lord, please give me rest; I have, O I have, Lord, I have come unto you and you have given me absolutely no rest."

And so he kept on writing. Writing, writing in hopes that one day his Lord would give him the rest he thought he strove for and probably believed he deserved. Yet it is interesting that he, such a smart and ingenious man, would forget Peter 4:8: "Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins." Kierkegaard was a learned theologian who could recite far more biblical verses and texts than I will ever be able to. But what he lacked was a true understanding of love; this was his Achilles heel.

Love makes us cry, love makes us smile, laugh, frown. All emotions, on some level, come either from love or a lack thereof. It's a curious truth I've had to learn the hard way, and which I cannot explain in words. *Les mots ne sont jamais suffisants*. All the philosophers who, like Kierkegaard, thought they were searching for the meaning of life were in fact struggling to lead a meaningful life, which is not the same thing. Even I cannot answer the quintessential philosophical question, how do we lead a meaningful life? Such a question is too personal and must, therefore, be answered by "that single individual," whoever he may be.

Everything I've ever done has been for someone else till this very point in time. Every journal entry I've ever written has been written not with myself in mind but with the mind of a prospective reader. Whoever she or he may be is irrelevant. I've agonized over how they'd perceive me, how I'd appear in their eyes. Every sentence I crafted, even in the depths of my despair and anxiety, was to impart a specific image of myself. Alas! this is exactly the error Kierkegaard made—that Nietzsche, Socrates, and every philosopher made—to live for some future generation and not for oneself, to focus on meaning and not on love.

I am not devaluing their work, for there is much wisdom to be found in it. I am not saying that they were weak or stupid, no, they were ingenious and intelligent, quite possibly far more ingenious and intelligent than I am myself. It is only because their philosophies lacked a single premise that they are incomplete. Though I will always respect Kierkegaard, it is time that I let him go. I can be whoever I want or need to be—but if I am never myself, *si je n'ose jamais être moi-même*, it will be all for naught.

L'amour is everything. A person who does not know love leads a life of quite desperation. Every philosopher has tried to discover the meaning of life, and every one has had his own particular way to go about it. Call me naive, call me a foolish boy, but my method is to assume all good things come first from love and end in beauty; and that, therefore, one must first understand love if one is to also understand the meaning of life.

It is now time I step into the love and feel its warm embrace.

5

The author now speaks as a sage, wizened by his experience. From this vantage point, he loves himself and humankind. Of course, he does not pardon them all their evil acts, but he does see the good in them and, most importantly, himself. He knows that all is about love, that the universe cries out for us to love ourselves and others, that to lead a good life, a meaningful life, one must first *love*. It is thus from a place of deep respect and love that he turns to his guards, points to Kierkegaard and says: “Off with his head.”

This is getting repetitive, but it does bear repeating: He is not killing the man, he is not even entirely killing his ideas, but rather the negative elements that the man represents. He is both the emperor and Master Sun, as we all are in our own heads. His favourite concubines were Kierkegaard and Socrates, and so they were appointed commanders of all the other soldiers, the other elements of his psyche. Their ideas moulded and shaped him, made him into who he was, but they also distorted him, made him less of who he was. Every “I know” was met with Socrates’ “But sir, consider...” Every “This is” was met by a Kierkegaardian “Alas! alack!” The army simply couldn’t respect him as either emperor or Master Sun because he lacked the most important ingredient of real, divine respect: *fear and trembling*.

The Socratic dialectic is a monster that, if tamed, will make you invincible but if allowed to run loose will be your destruction. Even before this entry our author saw that to master the Socratic dialectic he had to turn it in on itself, use its greatest maxim against itself: question everything. The conclusion that existentialism is a flawed Socratic pursuit would mean little, if he had not then asserted that love is everything.* Once we realize that love is everything, that we are not even a molecule in the great vastness of existence, and that the only thing that makes living worth it is love (to love and to be loved), we open the doors to true self-attainment and self-awareness. He sees that the love the first guy gave him, though not eternal, in nature was a portal to eternal love, to the love that encapsulates all things. He saw himself for what he was and not what he wanted to be, and from that vantage point he perceived all the things he did and their real origins. There he was, this molecule with such a short life, and he was listening to what his parents wanted? There he was, this molecule in the great expanse, and he

* In writing this piece, I had to spend months reading through Kierkegaard’s literature and literature on Kierkegaard so that I could properly assess the author’s ideas. In *On Irony* Kierkegaard calls Socrates the king of the sophists, because he did essentially what the sophists did: he shook the world’s foundations. The only difference is that the sophists attempted to reassemble the world afterwards, reformulate it; Socrates didn’t. Once shaken the earth is always shaken, and we must find some way to live with it. One could easily say that our author is doing that here. Yet what could be more ironic than using the Socratic method to destroy itself, thereby mastering it and making it your own, reviving it in a similar manner as Lazarus? And thus what could be more correct?

was obeying even the most ridiculous, illogical strictures? He had to break free, and he had to do so with love. We are all united by passion, and, after all, “what is love but the greatest passion!?”

Kierkegaardian philosophy was the last tether he had to the unbridled suffering of the world. This is no surprise. In his life Kierkegaard stayed in Copenhagen, despite hating it, as a form of penance, all the while knowing himself that God did not appreciate penance. “But why!?” our author screamed. “But why!? Our ultimate task is to love ourselves and to love others; we will suffer much in this life, but it is made bearable, sometimes even enjoyable, by love. This act, this act of self-hatred, is a disgrace for it prevented love from entering your heart.”

True self-mastery comes not from mastering your body but from mastering the cacophony of ideas and thoughts that claim to represent us. This our author did. There is only one way to do it too, and it is through love, which our author recognized. Everything about existence is paradoxical, especially our psyches. To embrace a paradox one must have love and be free of rancour. One must embrace it as we embrace a loved one, with open hands and hearts, and, should we wish to take it that extra level, a kiss on the cheek.

Meaning and goodness have been central throughout this essay, and yet really what our author has concluded is this, that both emanate from love. Therefore, we should not focus on meaning and goodness so much as on love first. This was the last entry he would ever make, and we must assume that he did step into love and felt its warm embrace. He would’ve burned the book otherwise, as he threatened once. In these pages, he didn’t see himself but a simulacrum, a past version. But because he was now in the warm embrace of love, he was neither disgusted nor embarrassed. Something deep inside him nagged, “This period of your life is over, but there is still something profound in it. Do not destroy it, even if you will do nothing with it.” So he walked downstairs, stood on a chair, placed the leatherbound book on the top shelf as far back as he could. He needed some time to reflect. He ascended into the living room. Perhaps he even sat in the same place I am now seated, on a sofa by the window overlooking the street. Here, he closed his eyes and saw himself among the people of the town. Eyes closed, he said:

“We made it men; victory is ours! We may rejoice, we may now be comfortable. But never forget from whence you came and the struggles you had to go through. Do not forget that once you were on the edge of a despair so profound that it threatened to swallow you up—and yet you conquered. Do not forget that once you were in a tundra so vast, a snowstorm so thick that it threatened to bury you—and yet you triumphed. Do not forget that you had two commanders who, though wise and sagacious, led you often astray in your blind obedience—and yet you prevailed! Do not forget that not long ago you were in a prison, staring at the blinding white walls fearful that you may forever be an inmate. Not only did you escape but you showed that you were greater than the prison ever was. You *transcended!*”

EPILOGUE

The world of 2095 now appears so distant from the one of 2021-2022. The pandemic and the resulting economic collapse presented one of the most insane socio-political crises in history. Today things are more stable, but at that time it must have felt that what was certain one week was uncertain the next, what was true one day was not true the next. Many call the twentieth century the age of Freud and Nietzsche. The early twenty-first century was the age of Orwell. Yet we are still human beings, and the truth of the matter is this, that no matter how much we change we're still descended from monkeys. There is no year from which we are too distant to not learn something.

I have always had a spiritual inclination. But this boy's journal only energized me further, made me more convinced of my convictions than ever. It is true that science is a modern marvel. I do not deny the biological effect, the stew of chemicals and atoms and electrons that make us and everything else around us. If I drink coffee, I am energized not because of some mystical force but because it stimulates certain parts of my nervous system. If I am shot in the head, I die not because of some mystic force but because the organ that keeps everything else working has been destroyed. But it also seems foolish to discredit the notion of the eternal. The universe is so grand and full of so many secrets that have yet to reveal themselves that to say we know precisely that there is no spiritual element is ludicrous. Of course, I do not follow any of the spiritual gurus of our age, mostly because they break the cardinal rule of wisdom, *to know that you know nothing*.

The concept of love cannot be properly formulated in words; it is something you must experience for yourself. Even our author only came to it by a thousand smaller experiences that added up over time. Love is universal, but it can only be understood subjectively, as with all things, and subjectivity is but a collection of anecdotal parables. Through subjectively looking inwards and constantly recording his sorrow and despair, he was able to overcome it. There was, of course, both a philosophical/spiritual element as well as a psychological component. In other words, there was also a worldly element to his struggles. However, he was lucky that both problems could be solved by the complete spiritual and psychological restructuring necessary to grasp the concept of love. Eating your cake and having it too is a rare treat in life, and so it should always be savoured!

I was not yet born when this journal was written. All the years of my childhood passed me by in good health and happiness, and yet I myself have understood this struggle, which is why I find it so serendipitous that this journal should drop into my hands. Sometimes late at night I now wonder what became of this boy, who is surely an old man if not dead. Maybe he became famous and we simply don't know; but I doubt that, because everyone knows a fully-developed, verily-enlightened person doesn't need fame or glory. On the last blank page of the notebook, I found a poem written in a different coloured ink, which leads me to believe that he wrote it long after the last entry. It went:

*One year in my life and I've produced a novel,
A novel of despair and anxiety, tragedy and triumph,
Where the protagonist realized in the final scene
That his hero was always there.*

*Love is everything, or so the premise goes
That from henceforth I shall follow.
And unlike Kierkegaard in the cliffs of Gilleleje,
I will not allow a simple seagull's squawk
To break my divine soliloquy!*

I believe that he lived the rest of his life happily, with a husband and maybe some children. I believe that he lived the rest of his days growing wiser and wiser. I believe he lived the rest of his days being loved and that he died with many friends and family by his side. God bless this man's soul! May he forever enjoy the peace he so thoroughly deserved, wherever he may be!