

News Flash --- Man Invented God!

Religious faith is capable of providing its Believers with great purpose, meaning, guidance, solace, identification, community, connectedness, comfort, and joy in their lives. There is a truth in all religions, but only in part, for there is no knowable absolute truth or reality. The ultimate subjectivity of our existence, perception and interpretations makes it clear that no myths or dogmas or holy books or even science is Truth Incarnate.

The role of religion throughout history has included maintaining customs, traditions, morals, and religious truths, as well as helping rulers control people. It may well be that for humanity a natural ethic, without religion, is too weak to become dominant in the presence of other powerful drives. It cannot withstand the savagery that lurks under civilization and emerges in our dreams, our exploits, our crimes, our indulgences, our abuses of power, and our wars.

The time has come today for ALL religions to step forward and become honest, relevant major forces on the side of social justice, international peace, tolerance, environmental protections, and human responsibility to future generations. Morally right must begin to coincide with what is socially and environmentally beneficial.

“Whatever sympathy I feel towards religions, whatever admiration for some of their adherents, whatever historical or biological necessity I see in them, and whatever metaphorical truth, I cannot accept them as credible explanations of reality; and they are incredible to me in proportion to the degree that they require my belief in positive human attributes and intervenient powers in their divinities.”

--- The Aristos, John Fowles

“I don’t know what God is, or what God had in mind when the Universe was set in motion. In fact, I don’t know if God exists ...” ~~~ “There are some 10,000 extant religious sects --- each with its own cosmology, each with its own answer for the meaning of life and death. Most assert that the other 9,999 not only have it completely wrong but are instruments of evil, besides.”

Under the Banner of Heaven, Jon Krakauer

It seems abundantly clear to Tiffany Twain that mankind has always had primitive, extremely simplistic, self-centered, narrow, and rather superstitious concepts of a Creator, and that all religious dogmas are incredibly naïve and self-serving. All revealed Gods are suspiciously anthropocentric, improbably revealing our Rorschach selves, our hopes and our fears. Humankind has invented many conceptions of gods throughout history, trying to understand and explain the inexplicable. But the “almighty” force behind creation and existence is a mystery beyond the innate limitations of our knowledge, description, understanding and certainty.

There is a Here and Now, everywhere, in every moment of eternity; and we each have only one life to live, for an uncertain while longer. We must, in this context of our mortality, make the best of whatever comes our way, living our lives as fully and meaningfully as possible, simultaneously honoring the deeper nobility somewhere within us all, which is our humanity. And at the core of our humanity is our RESPONSIBILITY.

“What we are before is like a strait, a tricky road, a passage where we need courage and reason. The courage to go on, not to try and turn back; and the reason to use reason; not fear, not jealousy, not envy, but reason. We must steer by reason, and jettison --- because much must go --- by reason.”

--- The Aristos, John Fowles

Planet Earth Ponderings

Imagine there's no heaven --- It's easy if you try

No hell below us, Above us only sky

Imagine all the people, Living for today ...

Imagine there's no countries, It isn't hard to do;

Nothing to kill or die for, And no religion too.

Imagine all the people, Living life in peace ...

Imagine no possessions --- I wonder if you can.

No need for greed and hunger, A brotherhood of man

Imagine all the people, Sharing all the world ...

You may say that I'm a dreamer, but I'm not the only one

I hope some day you'll join us, And the world will be as one.

Imagine, John Lennon

Exhortations to right action are, perhaps, somewhat futile. All great thinkers, saints and philosophers over the centuries have advocated, personified, celebrated or implied that **good acts are the basis of a just society**. Yet the commoner bulk of mankind generally does not make much effort to do good. Motives for morality are suspect --- seeking reward, pleasure, recognition, accomplishment, good conscience, eternal pleasure --- or avoiding condemnation, punishment, failure, hell. Right and wrong, in addition, are subjective and relative. Each person must ultimately do good for their own and their society's health. Empathy, charity, kindness to others, and actions against injustice and inequality must become our natural function and our common social ethic.

"Hope inspires the good to reveal itself."

--- The poet Emily Dickinson

Mankind's understanding has expanding greatly in the last 2,000 years, as has his knowledge of the Universe, and of himself, and of his relationships with his physical environment and with the biological context of life on Earth.

Yet we are a species of Believers, narrow-mindedly and somewhat desperately clinging to Holy Scriptures with archaic and anthropocentric notions of "God, the Creator." This would be just fine, if it provided us with a sense of joy and purpose and connectedness, and resulted in noble and virtuous activities, without having negative side effects. Unfortunately, history shows that this is far from the actual case. Religious dogma, in the hands of fundamentalists, has had an extraordinary dark side, motivating and justifying incomprehensible acts of cruelty, violence and inhumanity. Religious faith has inspired both great virtue and great evil. How can we avoid the growing potential for conflict that religious fundamentalism represents? Curious myths, preposterous fables, absurd anachronisms, and irreconcilable inconsistencies inhabit the Book of Mormon, the Bible, the Koran, and the sacred texts of most religions. We need a new religion, an inclusive one that is capable of great inspiration; one that utilizes the great fonts of mystery and spiritual drives in a positive, rational and emotional initiative to improve our world and ourselves. Let the Earth Manifesto represent the 21st Century's opening salvo in a striving to actualize a new spirituality honoring each other AND Mother Earth.

The Power of Ideas

Jesus Christ had a powerful idea, that virtue is love, and that the poor and suffering should be treated with compassion and mercy.

This idea was perverted into power and dominance doctrines so terrible, in their struggle for ascendancy, that **they burned 5,000,000 women to death at the stake**, during a 300-year period of the Catholic Inquisition, according to Dan Brown's book The Da Vinci Code.

Five Million women were tortured and burned to death for a variety of official reasons, including such things as being nature lovers, female scholars, or midwives easing women's pain during childbirth. How horrible!!

They were killed in a brutal crusade, using a bizarre campaign of propaganda aimed at vanquishing matriarchal paganism and obliterating the sacred feminine. The Church's anti-humanitarian goal was to convert the world irreversibly to monotheistic patriarchal Christianity. Righteousness, in the service of dogma, wrought terrible havoc on women, all for the sake of an absurd idea and a cruel dominance struggle!

Good God!

The modern legacy of the ostracism of the goddess from religions, and of male domination, can be seen to be sexual prudishness, misogyny, puritanical righteousness, testosterone-driven wars, and an ominous disrespect for Mother Earth.

A Renaissance of spiritual understanding and healing and fairness must be cultivated to rectify the wrongfulness of this legacy!!!

Our cultures and societies are a paradoxical combination of customs, tradition, conventional thinking, conformity, bureaucracy, and resistance to change, on the one hand, and openness, adaptivity, innovation, diversity, resilience, and evolutionary change, on the other hand. It is exceedingly difficult to alter the infinitely complex course of so immense a mixture of competing influences, interests, needs, impulses, ideas, constituencies, and relationships. Like an enormous ocean liner in motion, it takes time and sustained forces to change the direction of titanic entities. Our society is like a giant ship, with profound ballast opposing rapid displacement. The terrible terrorist attacks of September 11th allowed reactive forces to shove society to the right, but far too much and too quickly, and with too great an extent of unfairness. Each and every action has an equal and opposite reaction. We must now recover, and allow our society to progress, rather than regress. The Stern Father does not know best --- and patriarchal certitude is not morally right. We must all be open to a sustained movement back towards reason and fairness and ecological sanity this year!

"There were always, in me, two women at least, one woman desperate and bewildered, who felt she was drowning, and another who only wanted to bring beauty, grace and aliveness to people."

--- Anais Nin

"What can I actually do?", one might ask. "The answer is as simple as it is disconcerting: we can, each of us, work to put our own inner house in order."

--- Small is Beautiful --- Economics as if People Mattered, D.F. Schumacher

Apocryphal Apocalypse

Trust me on this: There will be NO Armageddon, no decisive climactic conflict between Good and Evil, no end of the world, no end to the struggle between peoples, or within ourselves. Even if we drive the human race to extinction, life is extraordinarily resilient, and Planet Earth will continue its revolution around the Sun for billions of years to come.

The best that we can do is to try to cultivate our more noble impulses, to strive to ensure our survival and lasting prosperity, to protect the quality of life and biodiversity, to establish more fair and more effective guiding principles and institutions, to strive for peace and social justice, to manage ourselves and our affairs more gracefully, to balance our desires and moderate our consumption, and to accept that personal self interest must be contained within a healthy context of greater humanitarian and biological good.

We strut and fret our hour upon the stage, individually nearly inconsequential, yet collectively having an increasing impact on Planet Earth. Let us not allow either fatalism, or a sense of futility, to render us ineffective in making our world healthier, saner and more secure.

Nostra Dame Tiffany prophesies that a series of crises will occur in the 21st Century that will force humankind to reevaluate its ideological commitment to the no-limits goals of Prosperity through Profligacy. We could mitigate the risks and magnitude of these crises by enlightened and intelligent planning, and by bold Solon-wise initiatives to reduce the growing desperation of poverty and of persistent inequities; by making a stronger commitment to environmental protection and restoration; by limiting American aggression and militarism, respecting other peoples and the sovereignty of other nations, assisting them in sound, sustainable development; and by making an epoch-courageous effort to make the inevitable transition to an economy that does not depend on hyper-consumption, wastefulness, population growth, authoritarianism, and the counter-support of war, violence, conflict and insecurity.

There is a very wide array of possible prognostications with regard to the direction and desirability of different courses of action, or inaction, by human beings with regard to the environment. The continuum runs not just from optimism to pessimism, but from triumphalism to catastrophism. Likewise, the continuum of possible responses to a specific envisioned environmental impact, such as human-induced global warming and climate change, runs from equally untenable extremes of "let her rip" to "shut her down," as physicist James Trefil puts it. Some sort of comprehensive and unbiased cost-benefit analysis would be the right way to settle such issues.

The ideology of the "Project for a New American Century," promulgated in June 1997, is seductive: promote global American leadership by significantly increasing "defense spending," making "the resolve to shape a new century favorable to American principles and interests." Yet it seems very clear that Principal and Interest are our primary motivators, and that aggressive unilateral world domination using militarism is an extremely dangerous and likely shortsighted gambit.

The American people have the power to limit the scope and aggressiveness and the unfairness of the activities of the Federal Government, and we must begin to do this NOW!

Immaculate Conception – What a Concept!

The Bible has been brilliantly successful! Starting with a creative and archaically simplistic Creation myth, and continuing with a confounding concatenation of historical genealogies, it moves to a curiously sublapsarian concept of mankind's Fall in the Garden of Eden, causing Original Sin --- and blaming it on a snake and a woman!

The immaculately conceived son of God, Jesus Christ! appears, and is eventually nailed to a cross beside a couple of thieves for the salvation of mankind (but of course only for BELIEVERS!). He is resurrected with an impressive lasting power and perseverance in the minds of men.

The Flood, and Noah and his ark, also make a good story, a nice animal story ---although Tiffany Twain must side with her antecedent Mark in finding it difficult to figure out how a mere 40 days and 40 nights of rain could flood all of the Near East up to the 16,000-foot level of Mt. Ararat! I'm sure the Bible has lots more gems, but frankly, I never made it to the end of the Book. Hell!!

"Convictions are more dangerous enemies of the truth than lies."

--- Friedrich Nietzsche

"The only thing more offensive than a nonbeliever to U.S. attorney general John Ashcroft is a believer who is non-fundamentalist." Yikes! Dangerous to have this guy in charge!!

--- The quote comes from a magazine article in January 2004

An enormous amount of time, energy, money, and resources are poured into religious activities, rituals, buildings, conflicts, and persecutions. Imagine how much better the world could be made if even a fraction of the negative and wasteful aspects of this energy were channeled into more positive pursuits! Tiffany Twain believes that everyone should practice the Golden Rule, and be more open-minded, not letting religious beliefs dictate intolerant attitudes.

Any attempt to understand the moral justification and religious certitude of fundamental extremists "must plumb those murky sectors of the heart and head that prompt most of us to believe in God --- and compel an impassioned few, predictably, to carry that irrational belief to its logical end." ... "Ours in an age of incredible faith." ... "There is a dark side to religious devotion that is too often ignored or denied. As a means of motivating people to be cruel or inhumane, there may be no more potent force than religion." ... "Men have been committing heinous acts in the name of God ever since mankind began believing in deities, and extremists exist within all religions."

Under the Banner of Heaven, Jon Krakauer

Opposition gives value to struggle ... "Persecution arguably was the only possible force that would have allowed the infant Mormon Church to prosper." ... "The early Church triumphed over persecution, yet in its turn it became "a staunch ally in every attempt to stifle the spontaneous spirit, and to stop all later babblings of the fountain from which, in purer days, it drew its own supply of inspiration."

"Uncertainty is an inescapable corollary of life. An abundance of mystery is simply part of the bargain --- which doesn't strike me as something to lament. Accepting the essential inscrutability of existence, in anycase, is surely preferable to its opposite: capitulating to the tyranny of intransigent belief."

--- Jon Krakauer

In the Beginning

“There never was a false god, nor was there ever a false religion, unless you call a child a false man.”

--- Max Muller

Human beings, like all forms of life, struggle to survive, and to reproduce in the evolutionary exigency of assuring the continuity of their species. We seek security in a world whose principal certainty is constant change. We have hopes and fears; fears of the unpredictable forces of nature, of illness and misfortune, of death and total extinction. We seek meaning and purpose, and we try to understand and explain the Universe and our existence within it.

Every culture throughout history has had its superstitions, story-telling, myths and myth-making, and religious beliefs, as evidenced by early Mother figurines, by clay and stone representations of deities, by cave paintings, by oral traditions and rituals and ceremonies, and most recently as encapsulated in the written word. Anthropologists have found extensive evidence in primitive cultures of Nature worship, animism, polytheism, idolatry and fetishism. Polytheistic conceptions eventually evolved into a more sophisticated “one God” understanding.

“During the period when men lived in sharply separated cultures, they tended to become ethnocentric, that is, each regarded his own culture as superior, desirable, moral and worthy; and considered all other cultures as inferior, ridiculous, immoral and unworthy. This was particularly true of attitudes towards religion. Each saw his own religion as the only true, revealed and moral faith, while all others were deluded and false.” “We can no longer afford to remain parochial and ethnocentric.”

What the Great Religions Believe, Joseph Gaer

The religious dogmas of the world’s nine major religions were created, assembled, and canonized in the 1,400-year period from about 700 B.C. to 700 A.D. Curiously, the nine principal religions of the world originated in the Near East (Judaism, Christianity and Islam), in India (Buddhism, Hinduism, and Jainism), in China (Taoism and Confucianism), and in Japan (Shinto). Today, the majority of people on Earth belong to the religion and denomination into which they are born, following the rituals without much questioning them, and often without knowing the beliefs behind them. They are comfortable with the communal and identification aspects of their religions.

Our modern best understandings of the Universe, of the Earth, of life, and of ourselves are astonishingly profound, extensive, and sophisticated. Specialists in every field have developed deep insights into the nature of existence, from astrophysics, geology, chemistry and biology to anthropology, history, psychology and sociology. Yet primitive dominion-oriented mythologies have been extraordinarily persistent in influencing human behavior, regardless of their myriad contradictions to far better and truer understandings --- ones that have been, and continue to be, scrutinized and confirmed, or modified, by science and philosophers. Such “holy” books as the Bible, the Koran, and the Book of Mormon can in a way be seen as simple, naïve, inflexible, self-serving, manipulative propagandas that appeal to and prey upon human hopes and fears. Too often, in addition to much good that they have contributed to society through history, they have had atrocious impacts on people and the planet. Today, we must embrace open-mindedness, being aware of the Power of Myth, the depth of motivations, and the great value of spiritual perspectives. But we must also find a way to prevent fundamentalist convictions in harmful dogmas to influence our world negatively. We must seek peace, not conflict, and long-term positive outcomes rather than shortsighted parochial self-righteousness. We must act cooperatively and resolutely to improve the world!

Faith and Fundamentalism

Faith plumbs the great fonts of Mystery, Hope, and the drive for Spiritual Communion that reside in the human heart. The purpose of this Soliloquy is to investigate the nature of both Faith and Fundamentalism. The world today faces a clear and present danger posed by extremism and intolerant righteousness. This is dramatically demonstrated by terrorist attacks of Islamic fundamentalists against the United States, and the Shock and Awe warfare of the U.S. Authority Juggernaut in retaliation.

One dictionary definition of Faith is: "Belief that does not rest on logical proof or material evidence." Faith contains elements of loyalty and allegiance that may be reassuring to the Believer, but faith is the very antithesis of reason. Often faith is extremely suspiciously self-serving, as in God's revelations to Mormon leaders encouraging them to take many wives, often very young girls.

Each person's sense of purpose may waiver during times of stress and insecurity. In such moments of weakness, one is more vulnerable to believing gullibly in doctrinaire charismatic leaders, faiths offering absolute certitude, dogmatic religious fundamentalism, and dogmatic cults like Scientology. These offer a haven from doubt, at times when uncertainty afflicts an insecure person with great anxiety.

Ironically, persecution and martyrdom powerfully counter-support religious fundamentalism. This can be seen by the inordinately powerful impetus given to Christianity by the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. It is also very clearly shown in the history of the struggles of Islam and Mormonism. What will be the long-term impact, in this light, of American aggressiveness and arrogance in occupying and humiliating Iraq, in attacking Islamic religious adherents in Arab countries worldwide, and in continued American one-sided support of Israel against Palestinians?

There is a grave danger to the safety and stability of the world caused by the U.S. pursuing actions that strengthen terrorism through deliberate and inadvertent injustices. For instance, the U.S. has become a perpetrator of terror against innocent civilians through extensive bombing of Afghanistan and Iraq, and against prisoners of war through torture and humiliation, all in reaction to our having been victims of September 11th terrorist attacks.

Questioning the doctrine and edicts of authorities is always viewed as a subversive act that undermines faith. Thus, dissent is not tolerated. This is true not only for religious zealots, but also for political leaders who portray their convictions with seductive certitude. "You're either with us or against us."

The real recompense of religious zealotry may be the compulsive nature of the obsession itself. It gives the zealot a sense of great purpose and self-justification. It eliminates ambiguity, providing the "true believer" with a narcissistic sense of self-assurance that displaces all doubt. It may give the faithful a fervent feeling apparently akin to rapture. Rage and righteousness at the sins and shortcomings of others distort the true believer's sense of proportion and fairness. This vanquishes any true sense of virtue, moderation, compassion, clear judgment, and open-mindedness, enabling a radical lack of moderation that all too often leads to faith-based violence and hatred masquerading as love.

We must somehow utilize the enormous energies poured into religious beliefs, channeling them into positive outcomes, rather than into such things as ethnocentricity, racial supremacy, war, the subservience of women, mean-spiritedness, violence, and the doom of civilization. Humanity cannot allow fundamentalism and righteous reaction to plunge our societies into chaos. Broadmindedness must be empowered, somehow, and parochial faith must be marginalized in political spheres. Support the separation of Church and State in all countries --- and the freedom of each individual to choose his or her own religion beliefs!

The Bet Situation Revisited

Philosophy is not merely some intellectual abstraction, but rather an extremely important aspect of how we look at life, reflecting our outlook, our motivations, our character, our values and our relationship to all of existence. The book Philosophy for Dummies, by Tom Morris, is a valuably comprehensive elucidation of philosophical thought, an analysis of famous philosophers and philosophies throughout history. In it, the author discusses Blaise Pascal's Bet Situation with regard to the existence of God.

Tom Morris states that we have one of two choices:

(1) We bet that there IS a God, and in our lives we get the following:

AN OBJECTIVE MORAL ORDER.	A Soul.	Free Will.
Life after Death.	God.	Meaning.
		Bliss.

(2) We bet that there is NOT a God, and in our lives we get the following:

No Objective Moral Order.	No Soul.	No Free Will.
No Life after Death.	No God.	No Meaning.
		No hope.

Ouch!

Tiffany Twain feels that there is a suspicious element of specious bias, of falsehood, of anthropocentric illusion in the way Tom Morris couches the Bet Situation in this context. Life can be full and rich and positive without dogmatic subservience to fixed beliefs. Karl Marx called religion "the opiate of the people," largely because of his perception that religion has been used throughout history by the powers-that-be to take advantage of hopes and fears to manipulate people into complacency. Betting on Hell's existence diminishes our lives, to any extent that it makes us complacently unappreciative of our existence at any given moment.

Tiffany Twain feels that any doctrine that is used to justify extensive and extreme amounts of suffering HERE on Earth NOW is a terrible thing. Religious doctrines that urge people to have more children than they can afford to feed are incredibly irresponsible. Religious doctrines that oppose contraceptive use, endorsing abstinence enthusiastically, are rather transparently reflective of sexually repressed puritanism, an atavistic and reactionary worldview with positive aspects in encouraging the social health of marriage, but also very negative aspects in its intolerance in rejecting and suppressing and discriminating against single mothers and "illegitimate" children.

Religious doctrines like those of Islamic and Christian fundamentalism are bad because they are used to suppress freedom of thought and action, and to keep women subservient to men in our societies.

The condemnation of the innocent by established religions is beyond comprehension. Almost everyone is going to God's Hell because they happened to have been born to believers of the wrong faith, or to non-believers, or to believers who have sinned and neglected to adequately repent? Oh, my, how unfair, how absurd! We create Hell on Earth for people, in the name of God in Heaven above --- does it not seem like there is a very deep profundity of hypocrisy and nonsensicality to Dogmatic Beliefs? Especially when they are used by the controlling elite in a seemingly cynical way to advance and support policies that are uncompassionate, harm inflicting, suffering-justifying, intolerant, manipulative, and ends-justify-the-means terrorism-provoking and war-provoking.

Perhaps the world would be better off without the Opiate of Belief. Rumor has it that smoking real opium at least has the side benefit of transcendental calm and an illusory sensation of complete satisfaction. The religious opiate seems to have extremely negative side-effects, like endless social conflict, frequent family dysfunctionality associated with Stern Father authoritarianism, unhealthy attitudes towards our bodies and sex, repression and discriminatory policies towards women and gays, and a far-too-pervasive and extremely uncharitable attitude towards one's neighbors who are living their lives in ways that do not meet with the approval of the Faithful.

Curriculum and Creativity

“Creativity is the unspoiled core of Everyman, before he is choked by schooling, training, conditioning, until the artist within shrivels up and is forgotten.”

--- Frederick Franck, Ordinary Magic

“Each age has a special risk. Ours is letting half the world starve literally and nine-tenths of it starve educationally.”

--- John Fowles, The Aristos

“Human history becomes more and more a race between education and catastrophe.”

--- H.G. Wells

A well-rounded education should be much more than training a pupil for an economic role in society. It must additionally (1) comprehensively explore the nature of society, humanity, and nature; (2) instruct and expose students to an understanding of the purpose, the justice, the responsibility, the complex whole of existence; and (3) train students in various skills and disciplines while simultaneously giving them the capacity to be awake to their own processes of thinking, feeling and action. This alertness will make them self-critical and observant and thus establish an integrity of perception, discrimination and action, qualities that are crucial to the maturing within the student of a right relationship to the self, to the student's culture, to society, to the tools we use, and to nature.

A good education should provide a sound grounding in all the fundamental sciences, and in an appreciation of the basic tenets of the scientific method. Being trained to think and discover, with an open mind, is important to each individual.

Also, in addition to the ability to analyze clearly, students must be exposed to the processes of synthesizing, of universalizing, of humanizing, of empathizing; of effectively communicating; of expanding vision; and of creating and appreciating art. And, we must strive to disarm prejudice, superstition, ignorance, and intolerance that is clearly harmful to society.

Education should be designed to help people live in the whole river of life, not just to facilitate ensnaring them in the little whirlpool of existence. The right kind of education cultivates the whole being, the totality of mind and heart, giving depth and an appreciation of beauty, enriching the consciousness --- and enlightening the self with regard to the interrelationships and interdependencies between the individual and the ecological whole.

Most established churches teach spiritual lessons that are based on sophisticated teachings that have evolved from very primitive ideas of the Universe. Spirituality in understanding is valuable and necessary, but fundamentalist convictions that one's own Holy Book contains absolute truths are absurd. Religion in a way is the result of a vast propaganda. Its virtues include some very positive social values, but its dogmatic vices are dangerous to society. True spirituality is sensitive, caring, kind, charitable, unlimited, innocent, open, self-aware and alert. Education should reflect the latter values where they conflict with the doctrines and teachings of the parochial ideas of established religious institutions.

Emotional Intelligence

<<Our personal myths shape our journey through life, our place in society,
and our relationship to the broader or spiritual context of existence.>>

--- Joseph Campbell

~~~~~  
A spirit of generosity is surprisingly good for the soul  
Engendering positive feelings through open-heartedness and noble-mindedness  
And the cultivation of good will produces both tangible and subtle satisfactions  
A lightness of being and a depth of humanity being our reward for natural kindness.

There are many figurative continuums of behavior that we can imagine  
Such as that running from begrudging stinginess to unstinting open-heartedness  
And while our dog-eat-dog world encourages mercilessness and isolation  
Ultimately our embrace of empathetic understanding and sharing embodies goodness.

Epicurious, the famous 3<sup>rd</sup> Greek philosopher of the Century B.C.  
Believed that in a wise life, Happiness could best be attained  
By freeing the self from our many anxieties and by reducing suffering  
Through contemplation, understanding, and pleasure, or so he maintained.

Empathy and good will contribute to harmonious relationships and peaceful coexistence  
While competition is most constructive in a context of cooperation and relative fairness.  
Aggression, unfairness, and injustices only lead to hostility and violence  
And belligerence seems to beget insecurity and reactionary retribution.

We increase our fears and divisiveness by encouraging greater extremes  
Between the wealthy few, the greedy, and the powerful, on one hand  
And the desperate disadvantaged many, the poor and the powerless, on the other  
So clearly we would be wise to strive to lessen inequities, taking a bold stand.

Emotional intelligence is a characteristic of people who empathize and understand others,  
and of people who are able to defer immediate gratification in order to achieve higher  
goals. It is a skill that can be developed, and one that our society should cultivate in our  
schools, along with good communication and compassionate understanding.

It seems apparent that we must vigorously pursue actions and policies to truly mitigate  
conflicts between peoples, to lessen injustices, and to reduce assaults on the environment.

The Earth and its denizens are affected more and more by our actions, and we cannot  
continue to be ignorant of our impacts. Immediate gratification of our basic instincts may  
be a grave threat to the future of the human race, so we must begin to see this, and to  
begin acting accordingly.