

A Thesis on the Philosophy of Life



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Richard Lawrence

Edition 6

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Introduction

Before I get into this, please consider that if you think too much about philosophy, you could end up forgetting how to enjoy life. In the article, I will refer to human beings in the male context only and this should not be taken as a slight on the female of the species; it just makes it easier to write. I discuss religion but I am not a religious man and I do not adhere to any religion. Philosophy is the study of general and fundamental questions about the meaning of life and the best way to live it. It examines existence, reality, knowledge, values, reason, mind, language and what happens upon death.

Throughout history we have had prophets and philosophers like Homer, Socrates, Jesus, the Prophet Muhammad, and Marcus Aurelius. Each has brought their own philosophy message to the human race. Their core message of how to live a good life and experience a quality and contentment in life can be found in their writings and in various 'adapted' books. Marcus Aurelius, the Roman Emperor 121 AD - 180 AD, wrote his 'Stoic Meditations' of his philosophy in a diary which was intended to be used by himself, but has since been adapted in various books and is now considered one of the bedrocks of Stoicism. If you live long enough and without any form of teaching in philosophy, you may find that many of your final conclusions on how to live a good life will merge with Stoic philosophy.

This Book is for Charity

This book has been written for charity and if you find it interesting and you have enjoyed it, please consider a small donation to my charity of choice, ['The Sick Kids Friends Foundation'](#) who support the Royal Hospital for Sick Children (RHSC) in Edinburgh. Every year over 100,000 children pass through the doors of the hospital, ranging in age from just a few hours old to aged 16 in some specialities.

Acknowledgement

I would like to thank Roy Harrower, a very good friend, for introducing me to 'Stoic Philosophy' and which acted as the catalyst for writing this thesis. There are books available in relation to Stoicism –

- **How to be a Stoic** by Massimo Pigliucci
- **Meditations** by Marcus Aurelius and Tom Butler-Bowdon
- **The Daily Stoic** by Ryan Holiday

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Exceptionalism

First and foremost, the human being is an animal and just like other animals on this planet, he eats, drinks, copulates to reproduce and sleeps at night. Many philosophers will claim that he is exceptional and stands above all other animals on the planet. This is because he is more intelligent and because he socialises with other human beings, and by doing so, he has developed intelligence and wisdom beyond his natural base instincts.

If a man is to be exceptional and above all other animals then he must continually prove his own exceptionalism in relation to nature. He can only achieve this by first recognising that he has a duty to respect all wildlife, flora and fauna but it is a personal duty, he does not have to become a wildlife or environmental activist to demonstrate his commitment.

Famous Quotes Regarding Man & Nature

“It is the marriage of the soul with nature that makes the intellect fruitful, and gives birth to imagination.” – Henry David Thoreau.

“Those who contemplate the beauty of the earth find reserves of strength that will endure as long as life lasts. There is something infinitely healing in the repeated refrains of nature -- the assurance that dawn comes after night, and spring after winter.” – Rachel Carson.

“A human being is a part of the whole called by us universe, a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feeling as something separated from the rest, a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty.” - Albert Einstein.

The Inner Character

When it comes to natural instincts, emotions and character, there are varied opinions as to how these evolve. Many will state, that you are born with it; it's part of your genetic makeup. Those of a religious persuasion might argue that your soul is born pre-programmed with a character and a knowledge imprint from God or through the experience gained in a previous life or many such lives. Others will say, it is how you were programmed from birth, either through your interaction with the human race (carved by society) or how you were trained and indoctrinated by your parents and even by your teachers, through your education. In extreme cases of someone with a vicious character, many will claim it was due to his exposure to divorce, the death of his parents, exposed to violence as a child through mental or physical abuse by his parents or a relative; perhaps by a bully at school?

Does the Soul Exist

The Greek philosophers, Socrates, Plato and Aristotle agreed that the soul must have a logical purpose, the exercise of which was the most divine of human actions. In the religions of Judaism and Christianity, only human beings have immortal souls. In Judaism, it is believed that the soul consists of three parts which are called nefesh (rest), ruach (wind) and neshama (breath). God's exhaling a soul can be compared to a glassblower forming a vessel. The breath (neshama) first leaves his lips,

travels as a wind (ruach) and finally comes to rest (nefesh) in the vessel. Of these three levels of the soul, neshama (breath) is therefore the highest and closes to God, while nefesh (rest) is that aspect of the soul residing in the body. Ruach (wind) stands between the two, binding man to his spiritual source. It is for this reason that 'Divine Inspiration' is called Ruach HaKodesh.

Does the soul exist, is it part of the heart, part of the mind or is it built into the cellular design of the human body? These are questions to which there are no logical conclusions; only a belief. I believe that there is an inner and subconscious purity in everyone that seeks to countermand any impure thoughts in the mind. This inner purity can be smothered and destroyed if the mind is so corrupted and becomes evil in its intent. If there is a soul, then it is part of the beating heart; for when there is intense grief, it is the heart that suffers severe and almost unbearable pain, not the mind. Only when the heart stops, do we die.

The Inner Purity

A child has very little control over how he is brought up and by a certain age, when he becomes more aware, he may already have a grasp of his inner self. Every now and then a 'special' child appears, and for no reason, that can be rationally explained, there is an inner purity that is instantly visible to all and remains visible throughout his lifetime.

His interaction with people and wildlife is a pleasant one, which many will appreciate, and as he nears the end of his time and in old age, he has already accepted that death, like birth, it is a part of life and he meets it with dignity and without fear. It is also a sad reality that many of these 'special' children die very young.

Wisdom vs Knowledge vs Ignorance vs Evil

Socrates the famous philosopher was born in Circa 470 BC and he wrote - *"There is only one good, knowledge; and only one evil, ignorance."* Thomas Gray was an English poet, letter-writer, classical scholar and a professor at Pembroke College, Cambridge. He was born in 1716 and this is a piece from his famous poem - *"To each his sufferings: all are men, condemned alike to groan, the tender for another's pain, the unfeeling for his own. Yet, ah! why should they know their fate? Since sorrow never comes too late and happiness too swiftly flies. Thought would destroy their paradise. No more; where ignorance is bliss; it is folly to be wise."*

I agree with Socrates to a certain extent but to state that ignorance is evil, is perhaps stretching the analysis a bit too far, but then he lived in different times. He followed his statement up, by stating that people are not evil on purpose, they do it out of ignorance. This is a hot topic amongst philosophers and ignorance is often described as residing in a person who suffers from the inability to learn vs intelligent stupidity, the person who refuses to learn.

Another argument, is that a person does not intentionally do evil because they have made a choice to assent to a certain action and they think it is right; in other words, nobody errs intentionally. It often starts when the mind is emotionally unstable and the person lets emotion overrule their morality and ethics. I often took my son to nursery along with my neighbour's young boy, whom I adored. My neighbour was a very nice woman and loved her son and her other son, an older boy. I

certainly could not see any evil in her persona and together with her husband they seemed a loving couple. However, there must have been some discontent, because her husband left her for another woman. My neighbour, drowned both her sons in a bath. I was heartbroken at what happened, but I did not see any ignorance or evil in her actions. I saw an emotional decision, driven most likely by seeking vengeance on her husband, which overruled her rational thinking and resulted in her assent, to the killing of her children. As a last action - did she also intend to kill herself but failed to do so? She was sent to a mental institution and I understand that she was released a few years later but I don't know what happened to her.

I once attended at the scene of a suicide, where a woman, who had two young children and on learning of her husband's adultery, parked her car, and walking up onto a railway line, she placed her head on the tracks in front of an oncoming train. Her actions, like the first, were caused by her emotional and irrational state and her assent to kill herself. One has to raise the question, could philosophy have helped her to control her emotions and to make plans to leave her husband and take her children with her to a new life. In other words, adapt a new lifestyle; after all, taking her own life, was not an act of vengeance as her husband and children were not harmed.

From my experience, evil is a bit like hubris, it keeps growing and is similar to a runaway train that gathers speed. Take the true story of a man who is released from prison after ten years inside for committing murder. That same day he is in a pub and has an argument with a complete stranger. He pulls out a knife, stabs the stranger in the belly and slices the knife up his front and in doing so the man's innards spill out and he dies. Now that is an act of what I would call evil; this is the runaway train, when the mind permanently destroys any purity in the soul, including moral, ethical understanding and reasoning. The rage is unstoppable and has to be contained, either through incarceration in jail or administering the death penalty. Of course, that evil should have been recognised by the psychiatrist before he released him, but then a man who is a psychopath is very adept at concealing his lack of conscience and the evil residing in his mind. I suspect for him; it was a relatively easy matter to manipulate a psychiatrist? Was he born evil or did his interactions with society carve that evil into him?

My conclusion on evil is that it exists within everyone, the ability to commit an evil act which springs forth from the mind, is countermanded by the purity of the soul that recognises right from wrong whereby assent is denied. If you reject the idea of a soul, then replace it with the knowledge of morality, ethical understanding and virtue. I don't think a man has to pursue great wisdom or even great knowledge, but there has to be a basic grasp of morality, ethics, integrity, respect, honour and virtue. We have to live together and to achieve that, we must be able to relate to each other with respect. The ability to listen, understand and to display empathy towards our fellow man is very important. It is this ability and also learning about other societies and the mistakes of those societies (as well as our own) that we can move forward.

Morality and Virtue

Defining morality is a complex subject and it raises many questions. Is it defined through a society's laws, codes of conduct or religion passed verbally and in writing through time immemorial which

have originated from wise prophets and philosophers? Is it an instinctive sense of virtue within an individual that facilitates his ability to reason with moral understanding? There is no doubt that when a society passes a law that changes a code of conduct, it is often seen by individuals as a means to overthrow existing and accepted morality, which has existed for thousands of years. Failed politicians often refer to this as, 'we have to change the law, because we now live in a modern world' which of course means, they have a personal agenda to fulfil even if it means the morality of a society is reduced to decadence.

At the core of every society there has to be morality and within most religions there is morality, but it is morality that surpasses any religion. It is a well that should reside deep inside you; some say it is part of the purity of your soul while others claim it has to be taught by example and others state that through experiencing life you reach a level of morality through reflection. In my experience, it is a combination of all three and there is no doubt in my mind that 'Stoic' teachings have changed my morality for the better. From the well of morality, should spring the qualities of Ethics, Virtue, Courage, Justice, Humanity, Temperance, Wisdom and Transcendence. However, as you reach your late teens, seeking guidance on how to achieve these qualities is often abandoned.

Many children, should be taught morality from an early age and many attend 'Sunday School' where they are taught the 'Parables of Jesus' and 'The Ten Commandments'. I was very fortunate that my parents sent me to Sunday School at a young age. In my teens, I read the 'King James Bible' and studied many religions, including the Islamic Quran (Koran) and the Mormon faith, 'The Church of Christ' which was founded in April 1830 in New York by Joseph Smith, and later renamed 'The Church of the Latter Day Saints'. My conclusions can be found in the 'King James Bible - Religion' section of this thesis. There are many story books available to teach young children morality. I am no Socrates but there is only one lesson worth paying heed to when you are starting out in life - a young man or woman should **never** abandon their morality, integrity and virtue to deceit, avarice and decadence.

Today, teenagers face moral corruption through Facebook and Twitter social media, the incessant political debates and the 'uncensored' violence, soft porn and human sexual decadence, which is on constant display over the internet, on the television and in the movies. In addition, illegal drugs, excessive alcohol consumption and online gambling lack any sensible government controls. In the UK consumer economy, banks and financial institutions, play a huge part in handing out loans to the young who have no means to pay them back. The young often end up in a debt trap, and invariably suffer terrible depression. When those pillars of society, those politicians and those celebrities, which the young follow, display a lack of morality, ethics and virtue, then more than ever, the teachings of 'The Ten Commandments', 'The Parables of Jesus' and in later years, 'The Philosophy of Socrates' and 'The Stoic Philosophy of Marcus Aurelias', offer excellent examples of virtue, which is a quality considered morally good and desirable in a person.

Some examples of virtue -

Ethics: To seek to resolve questions of human morality by defining concepts such as good and evil, right and wrong, virtue and vice, justice and crime.

Courage: Emotional strengths that involve the exercise of will to accomplish goals in the face of opposition, external or internal; examples include bravery, perseverance and honesty.

Justice: It is a personal approach to fairness, and a respectful attitude towards your fellow man. To honour equality, to want to do good; and for a person, being human, to not want to harm human beings. Justice is the crowning glory of the virtues.

Humanity: Interpersonal strengths that involve “tending and befriending” others; examples include love and kindness. The Stoics think of humanity, not as a virtue but more as an attitude to others.

Temperance: Strengths that protect against excess: examples include forgiveness, humility, prudence, and self-control. The Stoics think of temperance, not as a virtue but more as an attitude to others.

Wisdom: Cognitive strengths that entail the acquisition and use of knowledge; examples include creativity, curiosity, judgement and perspective, which is a particular attitude towards or a way of regarding something; a point of view.

Transcendence: Strengths that forge connections to the larger universe, nature and thereby provide meaning; examples include gratitude, hope and spirituality.

Moral Corruption vs Honour, Integrity and Virtue

The best way to cover this section is to use a fictitious politician as an example, let's call him Paul and he became an MP, a Minister of Parliament in the United Kingdom. After the UK referendum in 2016, it was decided by the majority of voters that the UK should leave the membership of the European Union. Paul ran a working office in his constituency and when he held his regular meetings it became obvious that the vast majority of his constituents wanted to leave the European Union and had voted for that in the referendum. However, Paul had voted to remain in the European Union and it became apparent to him that he faced a dilemma. In Parliament, should he support his constituents and their will to leave or should he support his will to stay? The third choice of course was the option to resign as an MP because he could not back his constituents against his own personal convictions. It was the classic 'Corruption vs Honour' conundrum. Paul, like so many Ministers of Parliament, had **no virtue**; he chose to back his own convictions and fought long and hard against the wishes of his constituents to remain in the European Union. It is a very sad day when a 'Pillar of Society' a 'Role Model' to his constituents, is shown to be morally corrupt, lacking in integrity and without honour.

Honour, courage, virtue and self-respect are the hallmarks of integrity. No man wishes to endure the trials and tribulations of adversity but a man who possesses integrity with those essential ingredients is suitably armed to deal with adversity and to meet it head on.

Empathy - Self-Restraint – Control - Approval – Regret

Empathy is the ability to understand and share the feelings of another. It includes compassion · sympathy · pity · feeling · concern · considerateness · consideration · tenderness · tender-

heartedness · kindness · kind-heartedness · sensitivity · insight · fellow feeling · brotherly love · neighbourliness · decency · humanity and humanitarianism. However, there are limitations to empathy and mine is often tested.

In social circles, I have heard many people criticising their friends, and even their relatives for behaving in irrational ways. The classic being the inability to put aside their differences and of course there is no empathy on either side; neither will capitulate and apologise. One must attempt to analyse what drives someone to behave irrationally, either mentally, verbally and even physically. There is always an underlying reason in the background but perhaps the greatest obstacle to resolving differences, is the inability for either party to conquer their pride and pick up the telephone. This brings me onto self-restraint and controlling your emotions.

The best example of self-restraint is during social conversation; listen with no interruption, think carefully before answering or voicing your opinion, and reply with few words in a lower register as opposed to becoming emotional and in a raised voice. It sounds extremely difficult, especially if you are emotionally motivated, but with practice, it can be achieved. There is an old saying, that many of us fail to remember, *“least said, sooner mended.”* I guess the same can be applied when posting a reply in social media or in a text message and even on the phone. As an example, I once had to take abuse from a woman over the phone because she could not get her alarm to work; an alarm that I had installed. I told her, I would come to her house and sort it out. Before leaving, I told my secretary that the woman must be suffering from some malaise and she was focussing in on me with verbal abuse, to find some relief. I was right, because when I arrived and showed her how to work the alarm (which was working) she sat down on a chair, burst into tears and apologised for taking it out on me – she was going through a bad divorce. To this day, I am glad that I displayed self-restraint and spoke to her on the telephone in a calm voice and with few words.

Every day we are faced with controlling our desires through logical thinking, we subconsciously examine our morality, our ethics and virtue. We examine the justice in an action and will it be fair and respectful? Do we possess the courage to carry through that action and is it achievable? These thoughts all occur within a few milliseconds, before consciously agreeing within ourselves to take a course of action or choosing not to. The famous Greek philosopher Epictetus taught that philosophy is a way of life and not just a theoretical discipline. To Epictetus, all external events are beyond our control; we should accept calmly and dispassionately whatever happens. However, individuals are responsible for their own actions, which they can examine and control through rigorous self-discipline. He maintained that we control our moral reasoning and all our acts depend on our moral will. Through our ability to control our reasoning we have also the ability to avoid taking an action. However, if we shift our caution away from our own reasoned and moral choices to things not under our control, seeking to avoid what is controlled by others, we will become agitated, fearful, and unstable. What’s not under our control is the body and any of its parts, our possessions, parents, siblings, children or country, in fact, anything with which we might associate.

Imagine you are witnessing an argument between two of your friends standing in the street; a serious argument which is nearing blows and to which you are not in the least bit interested in. You

are seriously concerned that this could be the end of their friendship and you will be expected to pick a side. Up until now you have listened intently, considered the options and decided to remain silent. You have also concluded that any form of input is just not worth the effort and you have decided to leave. Throughout it all, you have remained in a state of calmness and you don't want that calmness to end. You think, oh, what the hell, I will just tell them the argument is pointless, flat out pointless, and they are just a couple of idiots; but somewhere deep inside you, there comes a voice that tells you, that would be a bad idea - that inner self, where morality, ethics and virtue reside, has countermanded the proposed action from your mind. So just as quickly as your mouth opens, you close it again and carry on listening. You remain quiet and calm and eventually, you formulate a course of action to escape and perhaps break the deadlock of their argument. You take action and put it into play. *"Sorry guys, but I have to head off, I have a date with a gorgeous blonde."* Your friends stop arguing, and laughing out loud, one replies, *"aye, remember the last blonde; she dumped you."* They wave as you walk away and when you look back, they have stopped arguing and by their body language, and much laughter, with head turns in your direction, they seem to be discussing you. Smiling to yourself, you conclude, a result has been achieved; you have escaped and managed to stop them arguing – pity there is no lunch and no blonde.

Is a white lie morally ethical, is it virtuous? For as sure as night follows day, when you next meet your friends, they will ask, how you got on with the blonde, and another lie will be required. So, in the end, you have sold out your virtue, as one lie begets another lie. Virtue is an all or nothing package and to break with it, can bring much regret.

However, 'Stoics' will claim that regret is a waste of emotional energy and should be replaced with a positive memory. Many others will argue that to put aside any regret, whereby a negative thought is replaced with a positive one, is to play a dangerous game with your conscience. L Ron Hubbard, the creator of 'The Scientology Religion' called it 'Dianetics' - a system which aims to relieve psychosomatic disorder by cleansing the mind of harmful mental images. I have practised the Stoic approach and so far, my regrets remain intact as does my conscience. I have learned to embrace my regrets in a positive way as bitter sweet memories and an important part of my life.

Hubris – Arrogance - Pride - Mendacity

The ancient Greeks defined hubris as a person having extreme pride or arrogance. Pride becomes hubris when it becomes all-consuming. A classic example of hubris in modern times is when a celebrity states his pop band is more popular than Jesus and later, he is shot dead by a crazy individual who takes exception to the statement. So, in life, it does not pay to consider yourself above others and display an air of superiority, to display self-importance · egotism · pomposity · high-handedness · swagger · boasting · bumptiousness · condescension · disdain · contempt · imperiousness · pride · vanity and of course, immodesty. Throughout my life, I have watched many individuals display these traits and eventually, have their 'legs kicked out from under them' as they fall from grace. Sometimes the retaliation against them is from their fellows, but more often it is through drink, drugs, gambling, fraud, theft, cruising public parks, gross indecency and of course associating with prostitutes.

Pride is a terrible affliction and for some with a negative disposition, it creates within you an ego, a feeling of self-importance, the need to control and finally hubris leading to nemesis. Whilst for some with a positive disposition, it is a humble and content attachment to one's choices and respect for the choices of others, which creates self-reflection and a feeling of fulfilment and belonging. Cursed is the man who is caught in an internal battle between the positive and the negative sides of pride and is unable to compromise with others.

Mendacity is when a person lies, is deceitful, dishonest, tells untruths, is insincere, disingenuousness and deliberately prevaricates on the truth. Many politicians and celebrities in the UK and in western societies, fit these descriptions.

Credit Autocracy – Self Control

We live in a western society which is driven by a consumer economy; in simple terms, the government requires that you borrow money and spend it. Therefore, money for loans and used to purchase material possessions is readily available. This money (credit) is available by design to lead youngsters into a never-ending debt trap for the rest of their lives and one, from which they cannot escape. Those banks, those financial institutions which lend you money, do not want you to pay it back, they want your monthly interest payments to go on and on, and they bank your monthly interest. The money you have borrowed is spent on your purchases and ends up in the pockets of the large corporate businesses and their shareholders; the wealthy ruling elite. Perhaps the worst debt traps are student debt and online gambling which is driven and even encouraged by the UK Government.

If the banks and financial institutions fail, then it is the government, and using tax payers money (your money) that bails them out; whilst you remain in debt. The bankers never go to jail for their financial transgressions. Even worse, if the government requires money to stimulate the economy, it just prints it (called quantitative easing) and lends it to the banks on the condition they lend it to you. To make matters worse, if the government cannot make enough money from its exports to other countries, it just creates bonds which it sells to private companies and sometimes the central banks of other countries. In the worst case, a government will borrow money from the International Monetary Union and/or The World Bank which is based in Washington D.C. The government has to pay interest on the bonds it sells and any money it borrows. The current (2020) National Debt of the UK is £1.8 trillion and its yearly interest payments are around £49 billion. Therefore, the UK National Debt just keeps rising at £5,170.00 per second. The truth however is much worse, factoring in all liabilities including state and public sector pensions, the real national debt is closer to £4.8 trillion, some £78,000 for every person in the UK.

Your material aspirations should not dictate a path to debt. Self-control and a recognition of your financial limitations are all important. You must plan ahead; one day you will retire and may find that your pension from the government is not enough to deliver a quality of life. Do not be persuaded to get into debt simply because your friends have the latest clothes, the latest smartphone; because at the end of the day, all of these material goods have to be paid for and the end result can bring forth misery and depression if you cannot pay back the loan. A credit card is a debt trap; if you seek a

contented life, **learn self-control and recognise your financial limitations** and don't borrow money from your friends, as this can lead to discontent.

Planning a Lifestyle, Self-Reliance and Adapting to Changes

Very few young men and women have the experience or maturity to plan a lifestyle. Invariably it is formed through experience and social interactions and through these interactions there is no mystery as to how a school dropout can become a millionaire and a university student with a degree can become a drug addict. Sadly, and for many, disillusionment with life takes hold.

Are we afraid to take a 'new direction' in our young lives, do we make excuses to remain as we are? Does old age and retirement cement a sedentary path or do we rise to the challenge and seek new horizons with our new found freedom? The philosophy of Marcus Aurelius, and other philosophers, teach us to rely on our instincts, embrace our individuality and ignore, invalidate, or dismiss the information we perceive from society. This gives us the power to become self-reliant and to transform ourselves, as well as the world in which we live. As we age, our ability to relate to others' and one's environment, and to integrate one's past and future, forms a catalyst which provides a meaning for the present and brings forth an increase in life satisfaction.

Self-reliance removes any requirement to control others or rely on co-dependency, for when a person attempts to control someone else's life, it only reflects the lack of control they have on their own and co-dependency is having an emotional or psychological reliance on others and the inability to maintain one's own quality of life without it. Of course, the thought of losing a loved one, a friend and even a beloved pet will test that self-reliance and co-dependency to the core. Invariable such thoughts are laid aside to ease the mind but eventually there may be a day when such a loss must be met head on.

Man, throughout his lifetime, will work, play, sleep and seek happiness and contentment. Many will assume that material possessions, whether purchased outright or through a bank loan, will deliver it, and in some cases, it does; but for many, it only brings forth misery. The same can be said of wealth, which is earned through a man's sheer hard work. Can a man be truly content and at peace with himself when he undertakes work, perhaps even for years, when the wealth he derives from his labours is at the cost of much discontentment in his life and family. Beware of the pursuit of wealth, it is often a double-edged sword, *"happiness resides not in possessions, and not in gold, happiness dwells in the soul."* – Democritus. Some families cannot cope and adapt to the stress factors and perhaps coupled with a change in a man's character, the family bonds break. Marriage or a social partnership is continually a work in progress. The ability to recognise each other's failings and accept them, is all important, and Stoic philosophy goes a long way in making this possible. If you commence to shouting at each other and mentally or physically abuse each other, then bit by bit, the bond breaks. It's a bit like the 'chipped cup' analogy, each chip it receives, makes it less and less desirable, until eventually it is thrown away.

In your youth and especially in old age, you have to adapt to lifestyle changes; you concentrate on what you can do, rather than what you can't. This is especially relative to a person who has become disabled; he has to adapt to move forward and to get the best out of his lifestyle. When I was in my

forties, I met an old friend who was in a wheel chair and crossing a car park. I thought to myself, I could not cope with that, my life is too active. The last time I had seen him, he was in his early twenties and roaring off down the road on the back of a motorbike. Now in his forties, he stopped and we chatted. He told me he had crashed on the bike, not long after I had last seen him, and had broken his back. He was paralysed from the waist down. I asked him how he had coped? He laughed out loud and replied, *"coping has never been a problem, I have a great job, a beautiful wife and two gorgeous kids, I wish for no more."* We held conversation for a while and I watched him cross the car park to a huge SUV and opening the driver's door, he used his strong arms to lift his body onto the driver's seat. He lifted up the wheelchair, folded it in mid-air and placed it in the back of the vehicle. Smiling, he waved and drove off, leaving me standing with my mouth wide open and waving back.

My old mother gave up driving her car at the ripe old age of ninety-three and I had to force her to do so; she refused to accept that her right leg did not have the power to properly brake the car. I hope I enjoy her will and positive attitude in my nineties? When I retired, I had to adapt to a radically new lifestyle. I returned to photography, and writing short stories; these were hobbies I had enjoyed in my early teens. However, after time it was not enough. I missed the adrenalin rush, the challenge of pushing myself to the limits and above all else a renewed sense of excitement and danger that had been so much part of my earlier lifestyle. Then I remembered a hero of mine, T.E. Lawrence (Lawrence of Arabia) who fought in the Arab Revolt, during the 1st World War. When he retired, he commenced to writing 'Seven Pillars of Wisdom' and riding a motor bike as the only way he could overcome his jaded nerves and to raise his adrenalin. He died as he had lived, when he swerved on a country road to avoid a couple of boys riding their pedal cycles on the wrong side of the road.

The death of T. E. Lawrence, did not deter me, and at the age of 65 years, I sat on a motorcycle and never looked back; that was 6 years ago. It is hard to explain the exhilaration, the anticipation and the excitement I feel when I get on my sports motorcycle. From the moment I press the starter button and that powerful engine fires into life and the exhaust pipes roar, I experience such a rush, especially when I open up the throttle in sports mode on the twisty country roads. The interaction with the motorcycle is just awesome and any cares, simply fade away.

It takes a very strong character in a man to take a 'new direction' which brings the peace and contentment he seeks in life. The balance of work, wealth, family, friends, acquaintances, and social interaction should not be taken lightly and certainly not at the high cost of his own discontentment. Taking a further step; transcendence is the ability of a man to rise beyond himself. It is a character trait considered to relate to the experience of spiritual aspects of one's self and may be described as acceptance, identification, or spiritual union with nature, its source and the universe. It is not a religion and neither can it be taught; it is a graduation which is derived through maturity and existential thinking.

Self-acceptance is all important and the capacity to expand self-boundaries towards a greater awareness of one's philosophy, values and dreams. A man does not become a misanthrope or seek isolation and social withdrawal to achieve transcendence; his spiritual union embraces humanity without any air of superiority or absorption. It is a feeling of wellbeing, an extension of meditation, an inner calm which pervades the senses and brings an inner peace and a relaxed mind.

Moral Responsibility

Moral responsibility is a test of ethical tenacity and fortitude in assenting to taking a course of action which is the opposite of what one would like to do. It's not a decision that is forced on you, it is a decision you choose to make. Perhaps the best example is when someone puts their life on hold to look after an elderly parent rather than put them in an old folks' home.

Mindfulness

The five strengths in Buddhism are faith, energy, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom. Mindfulness is a form of mediation, it is the psychological process of purposely bringing attention to one's feelings, mental states and mental qualities. Mindfulness is where you are constantly watching your sensory experience in order to maintain duties, rights, laws, conduct, virtues and the right way of living. Self-awareness relies upon sensory experiences, which are linked to the perceptions of the world. Sensory experience creates a material and stimulating learning that is adaptable and it can evolve into knowledge. In general terms, sensory experience relates to the nature of observation and through observation, you use your own senses to make sense of the world around you and to maintain an awareness of reality, especially when a fact or situation, which you observe, is in question.

Meditation and a Positive Attitude

Mediation can take many forms and it is practised throughout the world. Perhaps, the most common (invariably those who practise it are unaware it is meditation) is lying back, closing your eyes and listening to smooth music. Unlike drink or drugs the impact of smooth music on the mind enables the listener to achieve a mentally clear and emotionally calm and stable state.

One can take it to the next step and purchase music which is specifically designed for meditation – the sounds of nature, swishing waters and of course electronic music that makes you concentrate on certain sounds within it. You can purchase CDs specifically designed for meditation and you can link to websites over the internet that provide downloadable tracks. Headphones that cut out all other noise should be worn for the best results.

Self-reflection is quite different from meditation. Many people will retreat into themselves and self-reflection of the soul is to be admired; it is a useful cleansing tool. However, it can also bring on depression, especially if you hold many regrets, and it can cause a withdrawal from social contact. For some, it is a fine balance, sometimes even a battle between maintaining a dark and insular nature or breaking out. When you meditate by listening to smooth music or a CD which is specifically designed to promote meditation, you are freeing your mind, turning off technology and shutting down any rampant thoughts, especially those which promote negativity.

Mediation can be practised anywhere at any time and as a means of controlling your emotions. The simplest form is to remain comfortable, close your eyes and concentrate on the sensation of your breathing.

Shaolin Meditation, takes it to a whole new level. It was first appreciated by a mass populace in the west thanks to Kung-Fu and the movies of 'Bruce Lee'. It is intended to let your mind become at rest

and appreciate the presence and lightness of the moment. Your entire body movement should become fluid and you should feel the energy within it. The purpose of this meditation is to fall in line with the frequency of nature, whereby you become immersed within it and learn to accept it. Shaolin Meditation is about bringing the mind and body into a state of balanced coherence. It is like a form of innocence and a sense of awareness that overwhelms the mind from somewhere deep inside; the peace you feel is quite incredible. Bruce Lee used it in his fighting techniques to develop razor-sharp reflexes but the average person can use it to develop a feeling of relaxed tranquillity in their approach to everyday life and social interaction.

Mediation is especially useful to counter –

- Grief
- Anxiety
- Anger
- Loneliness
- Loss of popularity in social media and social circles
- Regret
- Stress at work
- Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) - a mental health condition that's triggered by a terrifying event, or events (like war) either experiencing it or witnessing it.
- The creative mind – usually as a result of over thinking your writings, your plans, the future of your talents (celebrities invariably suffer from this)

All of the above malaise can lead your mind into acute insomnia which is very detrimental to your health. Perhaps, the creative mind is the hardest to counter because it is always thinking up new ideas and it cannot find sleep. For many, the natural progression is to prescription drugs and we read horrible stories of celebrities, who have become addicted to them. Many like Michael Jackson, Prince and Judy Garland have all died as a result of being unable to cope with the stresses, and the sleepless nights, brought on by the creative side of their profession. They all died of accidental overdoses of prescription drugs which they used to make sleep possible. Many youngsters and celebrities suffer from a 'loss of popularity' and their constant need for acceptance on social media and in social circles can have a serious impact on their lives.

If you have lived a very active life, it is possible that you have never stopped to look back, at least to any great extent. Life is full as you move forward, but as you become older and especially when you retire, you may have to come to terms with facing old age. For many old people who live on their own, loneliness in combination with depression is a serious malaise, it draws you back into the home. It creates an environment where an individual cannot find purpose and when they converse with anyone, they find themselves questioning their own words and continually analysing their social interactions. Sadly, loneliness is also an issue for the young; all too often they require a constant need for acceptance on social media and in social circles. It is brought on through their anxiety to conform, to please and if they are ostracised from the group, many withdraw to a lonelier lifestyle.

Doctors are quick to hand out anti-depression prescription pills, but it is not the answer; addiction to pills can destroy relationships and lives.

Those people who are disabled or infirm through very old age and live on the own, have the hardest time in facing loneliness. In the western world, in certain societies, many of the disabled and elderly are not looked after by their families. This is apparently predominant in the UK, or so the media would have us believe. However, I know of many loving families, where the young women and men are very attentive towards the disabled within their families, as well as their elderly fathers, mothers and even their other relatives. These loving families tend to reside close together in smaller communities. The disabled and elderly whose offspring and relatives are separated by distance, sometimes continents, can suffer a great deal from anxiety and loneliness.

Meditation can also assist in controlling anger, perhaps you have taken umbrage because of a reply on social media, perhaps you have a 'hair trigger' temper and blow off at the least altercation when someone criticises your words or actions? There are special anger management sessions you can attend that will help and you should take advantage of them because if you are continually involved in domestic arguments and your temper is raised and anger gets out of control, that is when accidents and even more severe incidents can happen. For centuries, philosophy has offered its own solutions to contain anger. One of them is mediation to achieve a mentally clear and emotionally calm and stable state. This does not necessarily have to be listening to calming music in the house.

Imagine you are in the car with your wife or girlfriend (anyone) and you are driving down the road. An argument ensues between you, with much anger on both sides. You quickly find a safe place to stop, you get out, and go for a short walk on your own. It gives your anger time to dissipate and this is usually because the interaction has stopped. Everyone is different; in some the anger subsides very quickly, in others it takes much longer. If you have learned meditation, you can channel your mind to replace the anger with calm thoughts and when you get back to the car, you immediately apologise for your behaviour. Controlling your anger can prove very difficult, especially if you desire to win an argument, but with practice it can be achieved – it is not an act of weakness.

Tackling anxiety, negativity, depression and loneliness can prove extremely difficult. I have listed some practical approaches below which may help -

- Practise meditation for at least an hour every day and learn how to apply it to your mind, even in the spur of the moment. The best meditation is listening to calming music or sounds for about an hour, but with practice you can learn to meditate anywhere, by channelling your thoughts on something that brings you peace and tranquillity.
- Replace the contemplation of grief, anxiety, negative thoughts and regrets with positive thoughts, including memories, images and any videos of your life that evoke enjoyment, especially laughter. Remember, regret is about things in the past that we cannot change, so we must learn and condition ourselves to look forward and move on.
- Put aside negative interactions like the newspapers, political debates on the television, social media and concentrate on embracing only positive interactions. Go out and enjoy nature, visit the zoo, take a walk in the park, meet people.

- Social interaction is all important, even a bus trip into the town and a walk about; anything to break the mind away from negative contemplation. Enjoy lunch in the town instead of always at home.
- When you are in conversation with anyone, listen carefully to what the other person is saying, and reply only when expected. Speak in a lower register and speak clearly and slowly. Never interrupt their conversation and always display empathy and respect without losing control of your emotions. Remember, *'the least said, the sooner mended'* and if anyone attempts to humiliate you, do not become angry, respond with good humour.
- Every action you undertake should be carefully considered and nobody, I repeat nobody, wants to hear about your loneliness, your regrets and your depression. If you keep talking about these problems, you have openly displayed your negativity to others, which may bring you, even more negativity when you get home? The majority of people for some inexplicable reason have very little empathy for a person who is negative and/or continually repeats their problems in company. When I was young (my only defence) a relative of my now ex-wife kept going on about committing suicide at every social event until one day he spoke to me about it. I told him, *"well why talk about it all the time; go on, just do it."* He never ever raised the subject again, to anyone.
- If there is discontent within your family, and **you want** to restore the friendship, make an effort (no matter how hard) to patch things up. Make the first move, don't wait for them, as that call may never come? If you suffer from estrangement through your stubborn pride – you must learn to overcome it. If you **do not want** to restore the friendship, then you must put the past and the reasons for the discontent out of your mind and move forward. There is nothing worse than dwelling on the past because it will eat away at you and invariably it will lead to depression.
- Plan a project, something that you will enjoy, find a core purpose that will take you out of the house on a regular basis and which brings you peace and contentment. Many people who are lonely, start by enrolling in study courses and as a means to re-engage in social conversation with the other students.

Everything is on Loan

A man's material possessions are all on loan, even his home. Also, on loan throughout his life are his loved ones, friends and pets. These may all be on loan but they are attachments that bring us, in many cases, a feeling of belonging, comfort and contentment. One cannot compare the loss of a favourite material possession to the loss of a loved one. Although, for some reason, as you enter old age and experience more and more loss of your relatives and friends, it becomes easier to deal with that loss; it is expected and accepted. In life, many people tend to take their loved ones for granted until fate, suddenly takes them away. One must accept and be prepared to deal with such an event and accept that an elderly person, even a very young person might suddenly die.

When I recall happy memories of those who have passed on, including my pets; I often burst out in spontaneous laughter. As an example, I have one of those metal dogs with a wagging head out in the garden. Its been there some twelve years and it is all rusty and one of the legs has fallen off, but its head still wags in the wind. Often when that happens and I am working in the garden, I think of the time, I put it there and how my dog 'Brad' started to bark when I moved its head and spoke to it like

a real dog. He ran off down the garden. Later, I watched from the house as he nervously edged nearer and nearer to it before he became satisfied that it was not real.

The other emotion that is often present is melancholy, but like laughter, I embrace it. Twenty years ago, my late brother-law gave me a small acer tree for a house warming present and I planted it in the middle of my garden; it's now about two metres high. Throughout the seasons, I watch its colours change and I think of the grand times I shared with him and his family.

When a man dies, his possessions are divided up amongst others and he should accept this inevitability and embrace it. The Pharaohs in Egypt went to great lengths to protect their legacy on the planet and even in death they ensured that all their possessions were entombed with them. Modern historians relate this to taking their possessions with them to appreciate in the afterlife but perhaps it was vanity, hubris or perhaps they could not bear the thought of anyone else benefitting from their possessions? One must also take into account that they interbred in the ultimate example of vanity, to secure their name and the health of their lineage. The great irony was that interbreeding deformed their children, brought early death and their possessions were looted from their tombs. Thousands of years into the future, many newly found tombs were opened by modern man, who displayed those possessions in museums and charged entrance fees to the tombs for profit – the ultimate sacrilege and a complete lack of integrity and respect. So, when you near death, rejoice in the knowledge that someone or indeed, perhaps the many, will enjoy your possessions.

Love

Defining love is a tough call, it's a word that is easily spoken but what does it actually mean? I can only provide examples with no real answers –

I know of many couples who have lived together in marriage and in partnership for many years. They have their children and they are constant companions throughout their lives. People call them 'soul mates' because they express empathy, humanity, morality and virtue and appear to love each other. They are inseparable; eventually, one dies, and within a few hours or perhaps a few days, the other one passes on as well. Some say the unbearable grief for the loss of a loved one brought on the other one's death. I have never been in this kind of relationship but I suppose if there is such an emotion called 'love' then this is possibly the best example, I can provide?

We always seem to remember our first love, those heart churning moments when we feel empty unless we are together. And if the relationship did not work out, we still look back with fondness, even if there had been some discontent. Sometimes we feel sad because we broke up, even when we still love each other; we are sad because our love was not enough to hold us together.

It has been echoed through the centuries and long before John Lennon stated it, "*all you need is love.*" It is a phrase that covers a multitude of parameters. Self-control is all important to govern the choices we make and to change the notion we have with something that irritates us, or something we regard as bad. We can change our views, our labels, our expectations and to accept and love what is happening around us.

A young girl is on the phone to her pal, *"I love my mum, I love my dog, I don't love my dad anymore because he would not let me go to the dance in my mini skirt and they were serving hot dogs which I totally love."* Is love just a word used to emphasise a greater importance than like? *"I like my mum, I like my dog, I don't like my dad anymore because he would not let me go to the dance in my mini skirt and they were serving hot dogs which I totally like."* It becomes fairly obvious that the word 'like' does not have the same emotional impact as the word 'love'. Today, you can see the youngsters scoffing hot dogs outside fast food outlets; the female expressions are priceless as they roll their eyes, wave their burnt fingers in the cool air, and shout, *"wow, I just totally love hot dogs."*

If a man dives into the sea to save his drowning child, is that an act of animal 'base instinct' to protect his offspring without any thought for his own safety or is his thought of unbearable grief for his loss, if the child should drown - or is it out of love? If the man drowned as a result, many would exclaim, *"he must have loved his child to dive into such wild seas?"*

This statement is often made by a man when a wife steps in front of him to prevent him chastising their son. *"You and your unconditional love; he is going to be a misfit when he grows up."* Immediately, most women would take the side of the wife, but consider this: is not the man's actions, those of a man who loves his son and out of love, he is prepared to rebuke him for his son's own good; despite the possibility that later, there may be some discontent between them?

When you are a very young man, you can wrongly assume that a good sexual relationship is love. Great sex can be like a good piece of music, but eventually you can get fed up with it and pick another record from a vast collection.

Friendship

Many people that I have met in my life have a persona and an outlook whereby they make friends very easily. When I head into town for lunch with my former brother-in-law, I am amazed at the number of people who are on the street or in pubs that he knows, and who come up to him to pay their respects.

Many of us leave a number of 'burning bridges' behind. Those friends at primary school, those in secondary school and university, even your relatives. Those guys you left behind at your last place of work; the list goes on. The bonds become broken because you have moved away or you have fallen out. Even the hectic pace of living has blocked the road to their door.

Your character has a lot to do with it and also your lack of tolerance for your friends' faults – we all have faults. Put it this way, you can maintain a friendship and tolerate your friend's faults and even his politics (if they are different to yours) but when his lifestyle begins to impact on yours, or your family or other friends - that is the time to walk away. It is advisable, to never go into a business partnership with anyone, especially a close friend or a family member; it can lead to discontent and a breakup of the relationship.

Lord Lucan, who murdered his children's nanny by mistake, (he meant to kill his wife) fled the murder scene to his best friend's house to seek help. Lucan told him what he had done and his best

friend without any judgement or comment, handed him the keys to his car, and Lucan drove off. Now surely, that is real friendship; how many of your friends, and without hesitation, would place themselves in the firing line of a murder hunt.

Social Conversation

I have learned the hard way that telling people stories about my exploits is not very smart. First of all, many people cannot relate to them and secondly, as my old granny used to say to my mother, *“keep your mouth shut, all your doing is filling their mouths with gossip.”* Granny was right; I learned later in life that the main reason people enjoy social gatherings, especially evening meals with copious amounts of wine, is to gossip about you, after you have left. A totally natural human condition which sometimes, brings diversion into their lives.

Epictetus stated, *“in public avoid talking often and excessively about your accomplishments and dangers, for however much you enjoy recounting your dangers, it’s not pleasant for others to hear about your affairs.”* Now, in older age, I can see the wisdom in those words. However, one must accept that a common thread can bind a community of friends together and it may be the workplace, or perhaps they have worked in emergency services or the armed forces? I submit, the tales from the past give friends a meaning to their lives, especially in old age and that is why they enjoy meeting on occasion and recalling past events; even if they have heard them all before. However, can a man find true contentment in socialising with friends who spend their time regurgitating time and again, past events which were important in their lives? Everyone has their own moment of fame, that moment or moments when their lives meant something but to hear it ad infinitum can bring forth ad nauseam. Politeness, for the sake of the feelings, can eventually strain relationships. Everything in moderation and least said, sooner mended, but heed the words of the philosophers -

- *“The key is to keep company only with people who uplift you and whose presence calls forth your best.”* – Epictetus.
- *“People are like dirt. They can either nourish you and help you grow as a person or they can stunt your growth and make you wilt and die.”* – Plato.
- *“Misfortune shows those who are not really friends.”* – Aristotle

Human emotions can sometimes prove difficult to control and it is wise to remember, that if you argue with a fool, especially over email or social media, you can end up becoming a fool yourself.

It is wise to ‘listen and connect to people’ rather than perform for them; but one cannot meet friends and remain dumb to the interaction. Everything in moderation and I have found that advice is best given when it is requested, rather than being forced on others in conversation. Also, it is prudent to let someone else commence any conversation and only interject when requested. It’s the same approach when asked a question, nobody wants to hear a prolonged narrative in your answer. In relation to preaching philosophy to your friends; well, it is a bit like religion and politics, some will embrace it (question and learn) whilst others will regard it as a threat to their way of thinking and

seek to distance themselves from it. And worst of all, you could be regarded as, *“here comes that boring stiff with his philosophy, who invited him again?”*

The Origins of Man

The Bible and Christian Religion, as well as other religions, tells us - it is through God that we came to be; he manufactured us in his own image. Charles Darwin, turned that belief on its head when he published his book, ‘On the Origins of Species’ which outlined that we evolved through millions of years from our ancestors to stand upright on two legs and become highly intelligent. Over time various theories as to man’s creation have been spawned in books and in many documentaries –

- God created the Earth in 6 days and on the 7th day he rested. God also created a man. This man was called Adam and he was placed in the Garden of Eden, a paradise, along with a female, who was created from Adam’s rib and called Eve.
- The entire universe is God and man was created by chemical reaction.
- Man evolved over millions of years and is probably a breakaway strand of ape.
- An alien copulated with an ape and created a new strand of Deoxyribonucleic Acid (DNA).
- An alien deliberately experimented with an ape and injected it with his own DNA.
- An alien dropped samples of his DNA into a river at the dawn of mankind, whereby man evolved with a superior intellect to other animals on Earth.

One thing I have observed in my life, many men seem to have an inbuilt urge to learn, create and preserve. Examples include the childhood assembly of a model train, to the reading of books to the inner workings and restoration of a car; building railroads, ships and planes and to the creation of a child with a woman. Some men, even think that their beloved car has a soul and will preserve it at all costs. In Japanese culture, it is believed that all ‘inanimate objects’ have a soul, and why are motorbikes, cars, boats, trains and planes always referred to in the female context?

For centuries, mankind has looked up at the stars in awe and pondered his being. There is no doubt that in the evolutionary scale, man’s ability to think and rationalise is a massive leap in intelligence compared to any other animal on the planet. Although the jury may be out in relation to dolphins and orca killer whales?

Man, has broadened his knowledge to appreciate the existence of millions of galaxies out there in the universe. Each galaxy has trillions of stars and each star is surrounded by its own planets; a solar system not dissimilar to our own, here on Earth. Imagine travelling through space for a year at light speed which is 671 million miles per hour and you will have travelled 5.8 trillion miles. The nearest star system to Earth, Proxima Centauri, is 4.25 light years, which is 24.65 trillion miles away. The Earth is a planet in the ‘Milky Way’ galaxy which is 100 thousand light years in diameter. The universe which can be observed by man is 91 billion light years in diameter.

Perhaps, this massive distance between star systems is a deliberate ploy to separate developing and intelligent species from interacting with each other? Once you put all of this into perspective, man is

very miniscule in the scheme of things and I guess for many centuries into the future, his origins will be hotly debated, but probably never resolved. As a girlfriend would often exclaim, *“does it really matter, you can’t figure it out, you can’t change anything, so why waste your time and effort in thinking and writing about it?”* Perhaps she was secretly a student of Stoic Philosophy?

Humanity and Genocide

The love for humanity is paramount to our well-being, we are all part of it. If we turn in on ourselves, we can lose all sense of morality, our ability to reason and this is what separates us from the beast.

I can understand how one man can lose his humanity and display the ultimate evil towards his fellow man, but an entire society that loses its humanity and morality is hard to fathom. Evil on such a massive scale is almost incomprehensible.

The genocide of mankind has been going on for centuries but each generation tends to just remember the most recent. After each one, it is often claimed that man is more civilised and it can never happen again, but of course it does. One of the most recent in 1994, is Rwanda where the world stood back and allowed the genocide of some 500 thousand to 1 million Rwandans whereby 70% of their population were killed. Of course, we can travel further back in time, many, many, centuries, and we have the mass killings of people. A classic example is the Crusades, those religious wars between the 11th and 17th centuries between the Christians and Muslims.

The United States of American, that pillar of democracy and freedom, won its lands from the time of Columbus in 1492 and during the 1800s, by committing to the genocide of some 5 million to 10 million native Indians, the original indigenous peoples of America. The remaining 238 thousand Indians were shunted into reservations and their lands were taken from them for European settlers.

Let’s never forget some of the slaughters of humanity which have taken place –

- 1755-58 Zunghar Genocide – 800,000 killed
- 1800s The American Native Indian Genocide – 5 million to 10 million killed
- 1915-22 Armenian Genocide - 700,000 to 1.5 million killed
- 1931-33 Kazakh Genocide - 1.3 million to 1.75 million killed
- 1931-33 Holodomor Genocide - 1.8 million to 7.5 million killed
- 1941-45 Circassian Genocide - 357,000 to 600,000 killed
- 1941-45 Croatian Ustasha Genocide - 357,000 to 600,000 killed
- 1941-45 The Holocaust, also known as the Shoah - 6 million killed
- 1975-79 Khmer Rouge Cambodian Genocide - 1.3 million to 3 million killed
- 1994 Rwandan Genocide - 500,000 to 1 million killed

It is impossible to prevent wars and genocides from occurring, because invariably, it is one man who **lacks** morality, ethics, integrity and virtue, who leads a country into starting them. The recent

conflicts in Libya, Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria are examples of the mass killing of civilians by the U.S. because they threaten U.S power in the region.

Living with Old Age

Three score and ten (70 years) was often regarded as the average age for human life but these days, some men live into their 80s and women, into their 90s. A great deal has to do with luck, genetics and the ability to live a life through eating properly, exercising and avoiding any external toxins entering your body. Some say that exposure to dangerous pursuits like mountain climbing and riding a motorcycle can diminish your chances of survival into old age and they are probably right? When your old joints and muscles stop your activity, you have to learn to live with old age.

Once you reach the age of infirmity, motivation is the hidden killer, especially when you live alone. The inability to find something that motivates you and encourages you to remain active, leads to sitting in a chair, head bowed over your chest and you sleep in a room that is overheated and with little oxygen. Some old folk sleep longer in their beds and lose all sense of night and day. The blood in old age leads many to feel cold, even in a room that younger folk would find comfortable. It is a dangerous cycle, and one that is easy to describe, but very difficult to overcome. Sitting around watching the television or sleeping in a chair or for long periods in a bed, leads to body sores and edema which is a build-up of excess fluid in the ankles, feet and lower legs and in extreme cases, the head. The worse part of the cycle is that many suffer from backache and neckache which leads to taking prescribed opioids for the pain.

My grandfather in his 90s never suffered from edema or sat around in an overheated room. The reason was that in those days, there was no central heating and he wore a lot of clothes in the house. He also worked in the garden and often sat outside smoking his pipe and watching the folk on the street. Eventually, he started to break up inside and I am sure a kind doctor in the hospital, helped him on his way – no prolonged mental agony in a care home for my grandfather. It's a funny old world, he never drank alcohol but he smoked a pipe all his life and never suffered for it.

Strength of character is all important, the mental ability to keep moving forward, even when you are very old and infirm, is the key. It's easy to state but much harder to put into practice.

Death

Many of the great prophets and philosophers gave a great deal of their time examining the meaning of life and death. Their writings detail how to lead a good life with integrity, moral standing, ethics and virtue but the meaning of life, appears to be more elusive.

When it comes to death, Socrates addresses it in a logical fashion, *“death is either a state of nothingness and utter unconsciousness, or there is a change and the soul migrates to another world; indeed, death is welcomed if I can then converse with Orpheus, Musaeus, Hesiod and Homer but if it is anything like a sleep in which there is no disturbances by dreams; anyone would agree that it is a pleasant state of being.”*

My old mother, just before she died in her nineties, exclaimed, *“what has it all been for”* and I replied, *“it is simply life mother, no more, no less. As surely as birth is part of life, so is death.”* Do the other animals on the planet give life and death much thought, I doubt it? I know they are aware of a change when they are ill but death itself can come on you so swift that it is often not realised.

Man, in his youth and throughout most of his life will be moving forward at such a pace that death is not even considered. It is only when he stops, either through retirement or illness that he begins to realise his own mortality. This also occurs when he is very old and he begins to experience the death of his close friends and attends their funerals. Strangely enough, many men in old age or through illness, seek a religion; some, because they fear death and some become born again Christians in an effort to atone for their previous transgressions.

In the days of the wild west in America, human life was indeed very cheap and many died on a daily basis; some whilst traversing great distances, others in gun and knife fights, and in the American Civil War, over 600,000 Americans were killed. During those times it was an expected part of life and people learned very quickly to accept it; bury their dead and move on.

My grandfather was a fisherman, he was born in 1885 when it was common for very young children to die as well as many young men in the coal mines and at sea. He was conditioned to death and he often voiced an opinion when someone was terminally ill, *“aye, it’ll no be long now, I can tell by the colour of his face.”* After a funeral, he might say in company, *“it’s a shame he was taken, but it’s part of life, we have to put it aside and get on with our own lives.”* I think his acceptance of the inevitability of death tended to make him say things in the face of it and as a recognition of its presence. It was all passed onto me and from a very early age, I recognised my own and everyone else’s mortality. When I had a family of my own, I made a point of kissing my sons on the cheek, before I left the house. I even carried that on into their early teens; until one day, they complained that they were too grown up for such affection, especially if their pals were present at the time.

Is suicide morally acceptable (in certain circumstances) or as in Christian Religion, is it classed as a ‘mortal sin’ because it is self-murder. Is a man, who has reached old age, and recognises that he has become infirm and a constant mental and physical burden to his family, morally justified in taking his own life? After all, his assent to commit suicide is not a selfish one, because it is to relieve the hardships of others. However, make no mistake, when you are a carer of an old person and you have spent many years looking after them to the extent you have no life, then however they die, there is a feeling of great relief but also a feeling of guilt for that relief.

Stoic philosophy teaches that death is not under our control and it will happen one way or another. However, how we think about death, is **definitely** under our control. When our pet dog reaches old age and in its final years, many owners will attempt to preserve the pet’s life for as long as possible. They find it difficult to accept the inevitable loss of the love they share and the impending grief when the pet finally dies. In many cases the pet actually suffers more for these actions.

One should try to accept death of a loved one or a pet as a natural process. There arises a realisation that the passing is part of life and although there is grief, the continual love is embraced in the bitter

sweet memories that you shared; the laughter, the tears, those incredible moments during your time together and many held in your pictures and videos. The ability to burst into laughter at a particular memory of a loved one is to be welcomed rather than avoided. Grief and the laughter in the memories of loved ones make for strange bedfellows, but should be embraced; tears and laughter open a passage to the soul and from it, an inner purity escapes to ease the mind.

Carpe Diem

Quintus Horatius Flaccus lived during the 1st Century BC and he was the leading Roman Poet in that time. In his 1.1 Book of Odes he features the Latin aphorism, 'Carpe Diem' – translated as 'Pluck the Day as it is Ripe' or in later translations 'Seize the Day'.

Horace wrote in Latin and this is my 'very loose' translation from his **1.1 Book of Odes** –

Do not ask how long you will live for it is forbidden knowledge.

Do not scan the books of your religion, there is no answer.

It is better to face the future like you faced the past.

Whether your God has many winters yet to give, or this is your last; stand firm against the forces of adversity.

Clear your mind and improve your wisdom, life is short, why should you expect more?

In the moment of your passing, will you recognise and be saddened that time has slipped away?

Live each moment like it was your last - Carpe Diem (seize the day).

Horace's 'Carpe Diem' is featured in the writings of Thomas H. Schulman, an American screenwriter best known for his semi-autobiographical screenplay for the movie 'Dead Poets Society'. In the screenplay, his character, Mr Pitts, quotes from a poem – 'To the Virgins to Make Much of Time' by Robert Herrick -

Gather ye rosebuds while ye may

Old time is still a flying

And this same flower that smiles today, tomorrow will be dying

In the screenplay, Mr Keating, the teacher interprets, "*gather ye rosebuds while ye may*", in other words 'Seize the Day' and the Latin term for that is *Carpe Diem*. We are food for worms' lads, because believe it or not, each and every one of us in this room, is one day going to stop breathing, turn cold and die.

It is worth repeating - 'Seize the Day' - Carpe Diem.

The King James Bible and Religion

This is a particularly large segment of my thesis but I feel it must be discussed. As I wrote above, at the core of every society there has to be morality and within most religions there is morality, but it is morality that surpasses any religion.

In 1604 King James the 6th of Scotland and the 1st of England sponsored the translation of the English speaking, King James Bible for the Church of England. It is a book of two parts, the first part is based on the 12 Tribes of Israel; their Judaism Religion, their history and nomadic struggle to find their own land and a land promised by their God. There is no doubt that over the centuries, the Hebrew (Jewish) faith and the Hebrew Bible was based on the passing down of stories and the writings by their prophets to provide the Israelites with morality and a hope for a better life, especially in 'The Ten Commandments' as dictated to Moses by their God. The Hebrew Bible in translation, is known as the 'Old Testament' and there are many accounts of how God aided them in destroying their enemies. The second part is 'The New Testament' and is very liberal. It focuses on the life and teachings of Yeshua (Jesus) who was reputed to be 'The Son of God' and crucified on the cross by the Roman Empire. It includes the four Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, twenty-one Epistles by St Paul and others, and the book of Revelation. The four Gospels were based on the testaments of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John who were followers of Jesus. The four Gospels were laid down in writing, some 66-110 years after the death of Jesus.

In the 'New Testament' the Romans ruled Judea with an iron and violent hand to maintain control. Jesus witnessed the violence, corruption and much decadence, which had become the norm, even amongst many in the Hebrew community. Jesus had become a prophet, a philosopher, and he did not seek control over the Hebrews, because his 'parables' were about morality, ethics, integrity, virtue, peace and kindness. The irony being that many centuries before him, Homer and Socrates had already concluded all of this; which is reflected in their own teachings of philosophy. Why did the Hebrews elect to save Barabbas a known killer, from Roman crucifixion when they could have saved Jesus, a virtuous man, who was crucified instead? Perhaps it was because the Christian liberal preaching's of Jesus and his growing Christian congregation posed a direct threat to Judaism, the Jewish faith, and one must remember, that Jesus was a Jew.

In 96 AD a Hebrew (*Jew*) named John, whilst a prisoner in a Roman prison at Patmos, wrote 'The Book of Revelation' after claiming he had received a vision from heaven. The book was intended to be distributed amongst the Christian Churches within the seven important cities in Asia Minor: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. His writings offered the Christians, under Roman dominance, hope and a promise that their persecution would end with the destruction of the Roman Empire. Just like Moses (*the Israelite deliverer from Egypt who wrote down the 10 commandments*), Abraham from Ur, in Babylonia (*father of the Israelite nation*), Yeshua (*reputed to be the son of God*), Joseph (*the Israelite seer*), Joseph Smith (*the Mormon*) and many other prophets, John claimed to be guided by God. His 'Book of Revelation' is interpreted in many different ways and some argue that it is relative to the past whilst others, claim the future. The end of days (*Armageddon*) is thought to have already happened and yet some believe it is yet to happen. All agree, that war is caused by the imbedded aggression of the beast in human nature.

In the 1st century after the death of Jesus, 'Paul the Apostle' who was a Roman Jew and commonly known as Saint Paul and also by his Hebrew name, Saul of Tarsus, was an apostle who taught the gospel of Christ and Christianity, to the first-century world. He claimed that the resurrected Jesus appeared to him in a great light. He was struck blind, but after three days his sight was restored and

Paul began to preach that Jesus of Nazareth is the Jewish Messiah and the Son of God. Approximately half of the book of Acts in the New Testament, deals with Paul's life and works. Thirteen of the twenty-seven books in the New Testament have traditionally been attributed to Paul. In the time of Paul, there were many strands of Christianity and religious teachings.

Three hundred years after the crucifixion of Jesus, the Roman Emperor Constantine established himself as the head of the church in around 313 A.D., which made this new "Christianity" the official religion of the Roman Empire. Many claimed it was a political move to bring together all the variants of the peoples and their religions to gain control over them. In this Roman Catholic Religion, you attend religious confession with a Catholic priest and seek redemption for your sins which is the ultimate method of religious indoctrination and control. This resulted in the establishment of 'The Vatican' in Rome and its Roman Catholic religious control of the masses throughout the world. In the 16th century, the Reformation (alternatively named the Protestant Reformation or the European Reformation) was a religious movement within Western Christianity that posed a religious and political challenge to the Roman Catholic Church and papal authority in particular.

Muḥammad ibn 'Abdullāh founded the 'Islamic Muslim Religion' during his lifetime, 570–8 June 632 AD and based it on the monotheistic teachings, previously preached by Adam, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and other prophets. He is viewed as the final prophet of God in all the main branches of Islam. He is referred to by many names, including Messenger of Allah, The Prophet Muhammad, Allah's Apostle and the Last Prophet of Islam. The two dominant religious strands of Islam are 'Sunnī' with the main population established in Saudi Arabia and the other is 'Shia' in Iran. These religious strands, and their affiliates, continue to war with each other in the Middle East very much like the conflicts between the Catholic and Protestant religious orders.

In 1948 the Jews, who are Israelite Hebrews from the region of Judea and the descendants from the time of Abraham and Moses and the 12 Israelite nomadic tribes, finally found their promised land in 'The Levant' and established themselves in Palestine and fought the British for control of the area which included part of Jerusalem and the known Holy Land. The Americans and Western Countries, sanctioned the independent state of Israel. In 1967, during the 'Six-Day War' between Egypt, Syria and Israel, the Israelis captured the Sinai Peninsula, Gaza Strip, West Bank, Old City of Jerusalem, and the Golan Heights; the status of these territories subsequently became a major point of contention in the Arab-Israeli conflict. Ever since, the Palestinians, the Syrians and the Iranians, along with their associated affiliates have warred with Israel.

Throughout the centuries since the founding of the Jewish Judaism Religion, the Crucifixion of Jesus and the founding of the Catholic, Protestant, Islamic Sunni and Shia religions, the world has endured endless conflicts and wars as the armies representing those religions and their societies have fought each other. Today (2020) we continue to have conflicts in Europe between the Catholic, Protestant, Judaism and Islamic religions. In addition, we have conflicts and wars in the Middle East between the Islamic Sunni and Shia religions, in combination with conflicts and wars between both those Islamic religions, and the Judaism Jews of Israel - all intertwined with European Catholic and Protestant

armies; especially America, that supports 'Sunni' Saudi Arabia and the Judaism Jews in Israel with the supply of military weapons and American armies.

It is due to the main five religious orders – Judaism, Islamic Sunni and Islamic Shia, Christian Catholic and Protestant, that we will never have peace in the world and it is a world that we all have to live in. Our virtue and our love for humanity surpasses all religions; but if religion becomes a catalyst for conflict and war, we lose both.

The reading of the King James Bible and my religious studies raised a number of questions, too many to list in this thesis. However, I did come to the following conclusions - religions are started by individuals who invariably claim to have communed with an angel and even a God who sets them on a road to convert man to a religion. In the majority of these cases the reasons are either a good intent to lead mankind down a moral path, or for recognition, control, and often for financial gain. Conformity instills a hope for resurrection after death and in this way the followers are bound to that religion. There is always good versus evil in the religious teachings and each lay leader acts as the soul and conscience of the congregation.

Religious teachings are often challenged by individuals who seek a more liberal stance. Invariably, a prophet who teaches spiritual purity in life is often elevated on death to a 'Son of God' or even a 'God' status by false prophets for their own power and material gain. These false prophets create a religion and a religious following. In most of these religions there exists the Devil who provides the temptation and leads mankind down the path of evil and non-conformity.

The Church of Scotland is Presbyterian; having no head of faith or leadership group, and adheres to the Bible and Westminster Confession; the Church of Scotland celebrates two sacraments, Baptism and the Lord's Supper, as well as five other rites, such as confirmation and matrimony. It is a member of the 'World Communion of Reformed Churches' which include the Church of South India, Presbyterian Church of East Africa, Presbyterian Church of Korea, Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus, Church of Jesus Christ in Madagascar, Federation of Swiss Protestant Churches, Protestant Church in Indonesia, Presbyterian Church (USA), Evangelical Church of Cameroon, and the Protestant Church in the Netherlands.

There is no doubt that people achieve a comfort in following a religion and believing in a God. It may be because they have experienced grief or having fallen from grace through alcoholism, crime or some other transgression against their own morality; and so, they seek forgiveness. Some become born again Christians to atone for the misdeeds which they have committed in their lifetime. Others who are lonely, find comfort from the social side of church attendance. One must never underestimate the power of a religion and a faith in God. Those who possess a fear of death, find solace in their faith and in a firm belief that when they die, their soul will be embraced by their God.

I cannot condemn another man for his faith in his religion and his God; a man who is virtuous and displays humanity for his fellow man, is to be admired. However, I would not follow him and become indoctrinated by his religious beliefs. I have long regarded many religions as cults and there are many examples, but perhaps the worst was the religious mass suicides of the 'The Branch Davidians'

at Waco, Texas in 1993. They are a religious cult founded in 1959 by Ben Roden as an offshoot of the Davidian Seventh-Day Adventist Church, which had been established by Victor Houteff, a Bulgarian immigrant to the United States in the 1930s.

I must play 'the advocatus diaboli' – in the history of the world, 108 billion human beings have died; are they in heaven, are their souls waiting on the resurrection and if so, where are they? Are they with their bodies in their graves, do they loiter about their graves? And the bodies that were incinerated in the crematoriums or destroyed in plane crashes, where are their souls? If they are all in heaven, it must be a huge place? Where is heaven, it cannot possibly reside in the clouds; is it on another distant planet in the universe? I guess every man who follows a religion has his own idea of heaven?

A minister from 'The Church of Scotland' could not answer my question on where God resided and the whereabouts of heaven; he merely stated that I should have faith like the unconditional love that a mother gives to her child. He held up the Holy Bible and told me to read it, but I had already done so. Within its contents, the morality stood out, but God and heaven remained elusive. I informed the minister of my conclusions but he cautioned me to have faith in God. He said that such a faith would ensure, that on my death, I would enter the 'Kingdom of Heaven'. I told him that Judaism, Islamic Sunni and Islamic Shia, Christian Catholic and Protestant religions, all believed in the same God, so what religion should I choose and why should I choose his? He seemed to regard me as a troublemaker, waved his hand and walked away.

I have no need to partake in another man's religion or bow to an unknown deity, a God. I maintain a self-belief that I strive to live with empathy for my fellow man, and to maintain a sense of strong morality with good ethics, integrity, virtue and the fortitude to see it through.

To Sum Up

There is no doubt that writing about philosophy and how to live a virtuous life is far easier than actually applying it. Human emotions can prove very difficult to control but it is desirable to apply your best endeavours to maintain your moral ethics and virtue; and to express empathy and respect for all humanity. It is an ongoing discipline; some days you will be able to apply it and on others, you will fail. Self-acceptance is all important and the capacity to expand self-boundaries towards a greater awareness of one's philosophy, values and dreams. A man does not become a misanthrope or seek isolation and social withdrawal to achieve transcendence; his spiritual union embraces humanity without any air of superiority or absorption. It is a feeling of wellbeing, an extension of mediation, an inner calm which pervades the senses and brings an inner peace and a relaxed mind.

Are we afraid to take a 'new direction' in our young lives, do we make excuses to remain as we are? Does old age and retirement cement a sedentary path or do we rise to the challenge and seek new horizons with our new found freedom? The philosophy of Marcus Aurelias, and other philosophers, teach us to rely on our instincts, embrace our individuality and ignore, invalidate, or dismiss the information we perceive from society. This gives us the power to become self-reliant and to transform ourselves, as well as the world in which we live. As we age, our ability to relate to others'

and one's environment, and to integrate one's past and future, forms a catalyst which provides a meaning for the present and brings forth an increase in life satisfaction.

It takes a very strong character in a man to take a 'new direction' which brings the peace and contentment he seeks in life. The balance of work, wealth, family, friends, acquaintances, and social interaction should not be taken lightly and certainly not at the high cost of his own discontentment. Taking a further step; transcendence is the ability of a man to rise beyond himself. It is a character trait considered to relate to the experience of spiritual aspects of one's self and may be described as acceptance, identification, or spiritual union with nature, its source and the universe. It is not a religion and neither can it be taught; it is a graduation which is derived through maturity and existential thinking. Beware of the pursuit of wealth, it is often a double-edged sword, *"happiness resides not in possessions, and not in gold, happiness dwells in the soul."* – Democritus.

From a very young age, I have always enjoyed looking up at the stars on a cold clear night and enjoyed the wonder of it all and my place in the universe. I have always had a feeling of belonging which brings me comfort, and solace which eases my mind. One cannot dismiss the possibility that out there in the vast universe, (somewhere) there is an answer as to why we exist and possess the intelligence to relate to the universe and to seek answers.

If a man is to be exceptional and above all other animals then he must continually prove his own exceptionalism in relation to nature. He can only achieve this by first recognising that he has a duty to respect all wildlife, flora and fauna but it is a personal duty, he does not have to become a wildlife or environmental activist to demonstrate his commitment.

Gather ye rosebuds while ye may
Old time is still a flying
And this same flower that smiles today, tomorrow will be dying
Remember - - - Carpe Diem – Seize the Day!

As I said to my mother as she neared death and questioned what her life had been for, *"it is simply life mother, no more, no less. As surely as birth is part of life, so is death."* I relate to the conclusion on death by Socrates, *"death is either a state of nothingness and utter unconsciousness, or there is a change and the soul migrates to another world; indeed, death is welcomed if I can then converse with my family and my friends who have passed on; but if it is anything like a sleep in which there is no disturbances by dreams; anyone would agree that it is a pleasant state of being."*



Marcus Aurelius - "Death smiles at us all; all we can do is smile back."