

F A L L E N A N G E L S

The Illusion of Self Improvement

A Proposal

by

Maurice Rowdon and Karen McChrystal

Please contact the authors at:
CREATIVE PROCESS CONSULTANTS
3237 Sacramento
SAN FRANCISCO
CA 94118

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FOREWORD

The substance of FALLEN ANGELS is drawn from the work of the two authors in their San Francisco company, Creative Process Consultants. Karen McChrystal works in psychotherapy, Maurice Rowdon in a non-verbal therapy called Oxygenesis.

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Most clients came to us interested in the creative process. That is to say, their models were usually creative or artistic geniuses. But early in our work we came to realize that what they were really looking for was a self-improvement program, much as if they had gone to a spiritual master or an enlightenment group. They saw 'becoming more creative' as the way to overcome psychological conflicts and discomforts in their lives.

More surprisingly, we began to see that the self they wished to improve was the last thing they were willing or able to recognise, so that their deepest desires were left out of account, and remained largely unknown even to themselves. Indeed, the very program of self-improvement which they wished to pursue seemed more an obstacle than a benefit. It was a source of new anxiety, because it set up goals, prohibitions and a chain of self-reproaches often worse than the original state.

Frequently clients felt that they were creative geniuses without ever having written or painted a line or taken more than a perfunctory interest in books and art. But they rarely wished to examine their real aptitude for the chosen art form, or the question of whether their feeling of being a genius was truthfully related to artistic desires at all.

Similarly, people who attend prosperity seminars sometimes report that afterwards they get into worse financial troubles than ever before. Many who undergo forms of 'spiritual training' say they experience the worst upheavals of their lives. Meditators report that their meditation is sometimes followed not by feelings of bliss or repose but rage and irritation, or acute depression. Is there something in the self-improvement program that sets up such anxiety that the self is hidden even more effectively than before?

We certainly weren't inclined to say that the search for self-improvement was itself wrong, that creative effort or meditational procedures were wrong, that spiritual masters whose devotees went through difficulties were inadequate masters. Nevertheless, we were struck forcibly by the fact that the structure of these people's lives was no different

from before, but simply had a new terminology. Depressions, negativity and discouragement tended to continue, if not increase.

In fact we began to notice that almost every client revealed strong suicidal drives of which they had previously been unaware. These drives were usually artfully concealed, and often masqueraded as worthy and life-affirming programs.

In most of our clients the very desire to be 'creative' seemed to exacerbate the suicidal drive, and began to appear to us only an ill-informed attempt to counteract the deep self-destructive process. 'I feel worthless' often came in the same breath as 'I feel I'm really a writer'. The very desire to create an imaginative structure (in the form of a book) implied a need to vindicate the author's life, and was, in that, a clear acknowledgement that this wasn't worth living. More, it was a disguised attempt to perpetuate that state of affairs. The book served as a clear 'deferral stratagem' whereby the suicide was postponed, without the drive behind it having been detected, much less examined. A long autobiographical novel often exacerbated family problems for the author, and the confessional element in the writing secured no release whatever.

Was the very desire for self-improvement a concealed flight from the self? Did a certain extreme form of anxiety crave for concealments, literary, artistic or spiritual, in order never to expose the deepest drive of all, namely the suicidal one?

Certainly, strong anxiety creates an anxious desire to avoid the effects of anxiety in one's daily life. It is this that drives people to seek some form of program which will remove these effects, though the removal simply enhances and strengthens the cause of the anxiety.

Indeed, people often cling to the neurotic structure by adopting therapies which they secretly know (or secretly hope) will be ineffective. 'Being a writer' may be a neurotic structure, and the book itself the ineffective therapy. Another form of this system, adopted by many, is continually to change one therapy for another, with the hidden design never to examine the original suicidal impulse. This is especially the case with depressive people (most of mankind?) because of the great pain involved in uncovering the original source of discouragement. Success is a universally adopted therapy in this respect.

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It was further demonstrated to us (with more conclusiveness than we thought possible) that the anxieties we observed were not simply a matter of personal problems, but something more dynamic, certainly more universal, which could not be dealt with on the lines of classical psychology alone. We saw the same syndromes repeated with only minor variations due to specific individual backgrounds.

The suicidal impulse seemed to be the result of a profound discouragement, felt not only in childhood, at the hands of parents and schools, but more generally and enduringly, in the very culture which pervaded everyday life. To treat the individual in relation only to his past, his family or lover

was to leave unexamined the thousands of daily reinforcements to his or her discouragement, which were encountered everywhere, even in the myriad self-improvement programs, which advertised the message 'You have no one to blame but yourself'.

Verbal psychotherapy was useful in helping the individual to clear up strictly personal aspects, but a further procedure was clearly needed to take the individual beyond everyday consciousness, in an experience which involved neither language nor the reasoning faculty. Unless there was a technique for locating the self as essentially non-private in nature, the problem could not be solved.

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Though we have found eastern enlightenment models interesting for what they reveal about the anatomy of bliss, we became convinced that the western importation of enlightenment techniques has failed to impart any genuine knowledge of how to attain bliss, or what might be called cellular repose, because of their failure to tackle the problem of the sheer tenacity of the western mind, and its tendency to translate eastern disciplines into further intellectual programs. We felt that under these programs, however much accompanied by meditation and chanting, the most extreme psychosis or schizophrenia could survive and flourish. It was somehow necessary to break these intellectual programs at the root, and to discover the mysterious connection between these programs and the suicidal drive. We found the 'creative genius' model useful to study precisely because it contained within it the effort to come to terms with the stresses and upheavals of daily life without either withdrawal or self-bifurcation.

But, more than this, we began to feel that something had fallen out of human history, some essential faculty or experience which had once (perhaps in the civilisations previous to the Graeco-Roman world) guided human beings and put them in touch with a knowledge no less rational than the one we achieve through deduction but of a deeper and more exhaustive nature. We thought that the intense rationality of the post-Roman world was perhaps due to the loss of that faculty rather than to the acquisition of anything new, and that if today we are confronted by an unworkable world it is because of the failure of the rational faculty to produce a full picture of experience, so that its blueprints work only partially, and contain a large element of destruction.

The more we encountered helplessness in people, the more strikingly distinct we found the 'creative genius' whom they wished to study or emulate. Was the creative genius a throwback to the earlier state, however unwittingly so, and however erratic his life? Did he preserve in some form the faculty which the generality of mankind had lost? Was it possible to retrieve that faculty? Above all, was the loss of that faculty connected with the suicidal drive we noticed so often?

It seemed to us useless, in the long run, to work with people unless we could remove that suicidal drive. But we

also concluded that we could never do this unless we revived, or attempted to revive, the faculty which we felt to be so deeply and tragically missing in people, and which amounted to a deep-laid principle of inner guidance. This is what we set out to do, and *FALLEN ANGELS* is an account of our efforts.

I. SUICIDE AND THE CREATIVE PROCESS

Clients who wake up with fear clutching the heart (sometimes in panic sweat) have a number of specific fears:

Will I survive (emotionally, financially?)
I'm not loved, therefore do not feel I exist.
The future is bleak, if a repetition of the past.
I can't make it.
I can't make it alone.
I'm totally alone.
I'm not understood.
Who am I?

Here are a number of statements on the same theme:

"I enjoy nothing, I have no feelings, I only think."

"I feel good when I see a film sometimes or drink or smoke pot or flirt but not when I'm working, making love, having a relationship, being domestic."

"Sometimes I feel on the side of the murderers, thieves, criminals---it makes life seem colourful and free and adventureous---the three things my life lacks."

"I want to write a long letter full of my dreams until it becomes the size of a book---my letters get to the bottom of who I am---listening to myself for the first time---no one ever listened or was interested---the blank page is my first listener."

"I haven't the courage to commit suicide. I feel dead already so there's no need,"

"The whole world's messed up and no one's doing anything about it, so what's the use of living? So I just want to write and be on my own, get money that way, and influence people without moving from my apartment."

"I'm depressed and this one won't go away."

"Everything's war---we're at war all the time---this is no peace---it doesn't need bullets."

"I don't know who I am. I don't know who or whether I love. I don't know what love is. I don't belong to myself. I want to write so that I can see myself from outside, from a distance."

"It isn't that I hate myself---I just don't feel SEEN, even by myself."

"I don't know what to eat, how much to eat, where to go, what to think. If I could paint it would make me feel calm, and maybe I could sell my paintings."

"I feel guilty all the time."

"I'm in a battle of hand to hand combat. I must win---it's my life I'm fighting for. I can't lose this time ---give

up, or give in, or lay passively defeated on the mat so my physical self will not die---for my soul will. I must fight---harder and harder. I've been avoiding going to work---" (Her work was hospice work among the aged)---"I can't fight for others when I'm in this battle for myself." (This was written during a session by a woman who, as a first step to becoming a writer, bought an expensive word-processor).

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An architect said, "There's no meaning in my work. It used to be personally meaningful for me---deeply so. But that's clouded over by feelings of guilt and shame now." (His mother had smothered him with over-protective kindness. He claimed that whenever as a child he had revealed any spontaneity and sense of adventure his mother had disapproved). "My mother was threatened by my spontaneity and adventuresomeness. She seemed very much to need me to be a perfect achiever, which impossible goal I strove to fulfil but never could. Each attempt resulted in the shame of not having really made it, however well I did."

A bright, successful young woman said repeatedly, "There's something wrong with me. I feel I'm a fraud. I'm continually guilty. Under the guilt there's a feeling that I'm responsible for my mother's decline into hysteria and alcoholism."

This client ultimately felt that her success was won at the expense of her mother, and fervently believed that her mother would be jealous and threatened by it.

Another basically robust woman felt ill every time she had the chance to realise some personal success. It was apparent that the illness had a deep psychological significance, because in every other respect she was strikingly healthy. It was later revealed that in the family of alcoholics in which she grew up she had never been allowed to express her feelings or be heard except when she was sick. That was the only time it was permissible to 'be herself'.

A gifted professional writer said, "I've always lived in terms of other people's expectations---I've lived a double life and I don't want to any more."

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Many clients felt even in childhood that their parents were weak, incompetent, anxious or neurotic. But until undergoing therapy they hid this from themselves (thus never questioning its truth).

The young of our species react very protectively toward the parent, because, since they depend on the parent for survival, they cannot afford to admit to the weakness of the parent: it would mean admitting to the perilousness of the environment, that is, to the possible collapse of their own security. The child then constructs a security system by picturing himself as protector of the parent. The way in which he does this is by identifying himself with, or behaving like, the parent, thus providing reinforcement. For example,

the child of an anxious mother will adopt an attitude of anxiety; the child of an hysterical mother will adopt a style of hysteria; the child of a depressive mother will adopt a depressive orientation to life. (It was not until twenty years after the death of her depressive alcoholic mother that one client was able to retrieve a sense of her own life, which had been 'deferred', through recognising that she had been living as though half alive).

In 'protecting the parent' or 'reinforcing the parent' the child seems to be saying to the parent "I shall not abandon you in your weakness." But truly what the child fears is that he will be abandoned in his weakness, and so he makes this secret compact.

As a result of these identifications the child's own life, his innate spontaneity, brilliance, sense of adventure, his basic ability to be here-and-now, may be deferred. It is usually only later, in adult life, when the child has outgrown the actual childhood condition of vulnerability, that he may lay to rest his concern about the parent and reclaim his life.

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We frequently see cases where clients have dreamed of or actually begun writing a book which puts to rights all the childhood perceptions hitherto foregone. These clients have used a creative process (in the form of a novel) as a vehicle for expressing the complete body and fabric of the life they have been obliged to deny in themselves. However, these clients have either not begun or not completed their manuscript out of a continuing fear that to expose their parents, to reveal what actually they have felt all these years, would somehow be devastating for the parents, whom they still perceive to be weak and vulnerable.

But in fact it is the clients themselves who still believe themselves to be vulnerable, even though they have 'rewritten' their history in a vein which seems truer to their real selves than the history they duplicitously lived in their earlier years as victims. Their belief in their parents' vulnerability is actually a screen for their own guilt about being stronger than the parents. Thus there remains for these clients further work to do in establishing the 'facts' about their existence. The last ghosts of discouragement have to be laid to rest. And this depends on the ability to recognise the value, indeed perfection, of the self. This recognition (which depends on a long process) of itself overcomes the fear that other people will be threatened by it.

One of these clients in fact finished the sixth version of her long autobiographical novel, which gave portraits of her parents and husband, but not of the 'I' of the book, which was clearly herself. She was reluctant to submit the manuscript to publishers, despite its being a first-class piece of work; and when she did submit it, she invariably recalled it 'for further revision'. She believed she would hurt her parents. Six times she produced a clean manuscript without visible corrections, as if to wipe out the previous one. But a common thread ran through these versions---the

fact that she herself was left out of the narrative as a strong personality motivating others. Her reluctance to publish and her fear of hurting her parents were clearly a screen for her belief in her own weakness and vulnerability rather than belief in her strength. She wasn't able to affirm her worth as a person until she'd relinquished a basic feeling that she was guilty for her parents' suffering and her husband's death. Her belief in her guilt prevented her from stating the degree of her participation in any 'bad' situation she might be describing.

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A young woman who wrote and published poetry told us during therapy, "All I ever looked for in any literary situation---public readings, publication parties, discussion groups or interviews---was a possible sexual contact. When, as a result of therapy, this appetite fell away, I felt that life had become completely empty." This wasn't all. Her desire to write collapsed along with the collapse of the sexual drive, though she didn't connect the two.

There are manifold ways of sabotaging our actual powers, screening them over by claiming powers we only wish to possess, or which we think it would bring us kudos to display, in a continuance of the childhood effort to live according to the supposed needs and demands of other people, that is to some program external to ourselves.

But real creativity follows our recognition of our innate capacities, not those we would like to have because the program looks acceptable, socially or otherwise.

II. FALLEN ANGELS

We thought that with increasing stress and personal misery the drive for celebrity, wealth and creative genius would increase proportionately, and on a global scale.

In an African village, once the technology arrives, the desire for a protective cultural structure must sooner or later follow. Manuscripts start to be written, pictures painted. Drama schools are established. The capitals of media technology-- New York, Los Angeles, London, Munich etc---quickly become Meccas. Places which never aspired to having a literature for the simple reason that nobody ever read or wrote, are now subsidised in dollars, pounds or francs to produce one. A great literature becomes an inalienable social right along with airports, credit cards and paid vacations. New universities get their creative writing departments, and it will be obvious to everyone that the nation only lacked a literature because it didn't have the cash.

Under this prestige program the idea soon gets around, often with the support of the media, arts councils and creative writing departments, that being a creative genius can be made

comfortable in the technological world.

However, most of the creative geniuses we know about not only suffered monstrously but were mostly unheard of when not publicly despised, persecuted and deprived. Mozart was a classic example.

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Yet the desire to imitate the creative genius isn't just an idle wish for prestige or money. Nor even is the desire to have a literature. Perhaps people recognise in the creative genius some stamina or extra force which survives the daily blasts of discouragement and which makes him peculiarly satisfied with being himself. And he seems to derive from the darkest scenes in his work a sense of bliss. He is in some way an angel, if a fallen one.

Is it this suggestion of an angelic immunity in the creative genius that tempts the technological victim to imitate him? How was it possible for Edgar Allan Poe to write so persistently and with such evident pleasure and momentum, though he remained neglected in his own country, and died a drunkard and a pauper?

If we look back on the imaginative works of mankind we see a dramatization of unthinkable misery, frustration and disappointment, in other words a thousand variations on the theme of human suicide. Is it possible that every one of us, not simply the lone genius, has been the victim of a pervasive discouragement at the core of social life, which we translate, for fear of facing the true reality, into a drama going on with the parents and in terms of what Freud called the 'primal scene'?

Is it that the lone artist was (in the days before social security) singled out for particular and spectacular discouragement while in fact the discouragement was general, if unexpressed and unlocated by the majority---including the upper classes who only saw themselves fortunate by comparison with those lower down in the social scale? Has the western world specialised in a subtle torture of its inhabitants, robbing them of their inner resources while urging them in the name of high moral endeavour ('creativity' is part of that call, today) to lift themselves out of the mire?

In psychotherapeutic sessions the questions arise again and again, first, how did such utter self-rejection come about; second, how did it manage to hide itself under such convincing displays of self-acceptance---to hide even from the client himself; third, where does the energy come from to go on?

Energy there certainly is, and it seems to come from the awareness in almost everyone of some inimitable uniqueness in themselves which cannot be quenched but which, on the contrary, makes material for hope out of discouragement.

The 'creativity' in today's world is enormous. For every book published there are thousands that never get beyond manuscript form. The cost of publishing escalates to the point where a manuscript is judged first for its market appeal and second for its value (the one must not be overwhelmingly

disproportionate to the other). Every year thousands of plays pour into the theaters and the dramatic agencies--- as theaters go bankrupt and the cost of the normal show makes even a three-month run at 95% capacity audiences a mere breakeven project. Gallery owners, to survive heavy rents and small sales, ask for as much as 80% in commission from their artists. Filmscripts go the rounds of the companies and agencies that don't even look at them or return them for the simple reason that films come about largely as pre-arranged packages within the industry, or from a best-selling novel. But nothing daunts the 'creative'---rejection slips, gallery rents, dark theaters, the collapse of the film industry, the indifference of the TV companies: these things are grist to the mill. People paper rooms with rejection slips---remembering that Beckett got thirty or forty for his first prose work.

III. I THINK THEREFORE I AM

Does the deep inner discouragement we find so often in ourselves (if we allow ourselves a long look) have a historical basis? Is it more than the work of a few technological decades, more even than the work of two centuries of industrialization?

In the mediaeval period we see the Christian so humbled, compared with his Greek and Roman forbear, that we must wonder whether in Christianity there hasn't been a systematic discouragement of the human being from the beginning, and whether this essentially Christian structure of ideas doesn't continue to underpin our lives, though transmuted now into quite untheological terms. (Oddly enough, Christ himself has little place in this discussion because it is difficult to find a breath of discouragement in anything he said).

The doctrine of renunciation was so pervasive in mediaeval times that we might well wonder whether buried in it was a powerful suicidal drive---so great is the contrast with the joy and forgiveness of the original Christian teaching as it was expounded in Christian Alexandria under the gnostics and neo-platonists. Was the morbid awareness of death in mediaeval times, the sense of reward or punishment on the other side of death, so deep as to incur a virtual collapse of the human auto-immune system in the form of deadly plagues?

The Renaissance has been so called because it ended this period by harking once more back to the ancient world and its doctrine of the 'perfect man', that is the uniqueness of every creature that made him an image (for the neo-platonists) of that most perfect of all men, Christ himself.

But that 'rebirth' was abortive. Or rather, the child was certainly born but stifled before it came of age. First Rome, then Florence was sacked---Rome by the Holy Roman Emperor using Spanish troops, Florence by a Florentine and a de' Medici, Pope Clement VII, who also used Spanish troops. The 'Spanish

occupation' of Italy began, cauterizing the artistic imagination for centuries. What Spanish soldiers didn't do in the public squares, another Spanish army, the new Jesuit order, with its General, did in the conscience and the heart.

There were other revolutions, largely political---the Protestant revolution in Germany, the French revolution, the American revolution, all three in a large sense against the inner discouragement of privilege, and connected with each other. But they too failed to stem the tide.

Albert Camus said about suicide, 'An act like this is prepared in the silence of the heart, as is the great work of art.' Is it possible that suicide can also be prepared racially, and that our situation today is the result of millenia of clever preparation, with the result that the atomic theory of the ancient Greeks grew by some terrible compulsion into the lethal radiation of our day?

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One aspect of Christian civilisation separates it from its ancient predecessors and that is its well-nigh obsessive intellectuality. Were Greek rationalism and the Christian intellectuality which it parented the result of a loss of bliss in the human psyche, amounting to a loss of identity?

Certainly there is a striking difference between the quiet, ecstatic smile of the early Greek stone head and the tragic mask of the late period. The Etruscans too differed sharply from the Romans in this respect, as if they still had contact with an earlier, more blissful consciousness. The Egyptian face too had that smile. And we know that Pythagoras, when he went to Egypt for his enlightenment, was told by a priest to give up his 'knowledge', that is the very reasoning faculty that was Greece's pride.

Aristotelian thinking, too, with its emphasis on system, analysis and the need for continual effort to achieve perfection was a departure from the former consciousness. It entered Christian thought at its germination, with the result that St Augustine and St Thomas Aquinas appear to us more scholars than mystics. They gave rise to a scholastic tradition that dominated the mediaeval monasteries to the point of obsession.

The cartesian doctrine was necessary for the modern scientific process. It rescued the Christian mind from superstition, undefinable fears and scholastic absurdities by continuing the best traditions of the mediaeval schools of mechanics and mathematics. It firmly established a universe operating according to objective and unchangeable law.

But with this new approach came the collapse of whatever eluded law, analysis and formulation, namely, most of the human being's life. Thought, it seemed, could not account for more than a fraction of experience, and art now tended to supply the rest.

IV. ART AS A VISION

To Art now fell the task of describing and in some sense explaining human experience, almost to replace a lost religion. However subjective and private it might be declared to be by science, its products continued to pour forth---and to create resistance by celebrating the very things society was less and less concerned about, namely love as opposed to money, doubts and guesses and fears as opposed to the certainties of empirical knowledge, tragedy and pessimism as opposed to the positivist vigor of the men who increasingly saw society in mathematical, functional, secular terms and were actually bringing it about.

The nineteenth century philosophy of the lone creative genius, the 'great' man, maintained that there was something born in him, a unique and inimitable facet which other men lacked. A theme ran through his life from early childhood marking him out for a path quite different from others. As society became more industrial and the human being more narrowly defined in terms of his work, so the lone genius stood outside it all as a challenge, often a judge or prophet who dazzled and inspired in order to be heard. At work in him was a tumultuous unconscious activity which in some way put the current rationalism to shame, and which no amount of striving or training by other men could reproduce.

V. THE MYTH OF THE CREATIVE PROCESS

As soon as we look at the process by which the so-called creative genius produces a work of art we find it extremely difficult to locate the creative element.

Who exactly is the creator? Behind the artist's 'flash of recognition', his 'inspiration', there seems to lie an automatic zone over which the conscious or trained mind has little control. The material for his work comes largely in the form of memories (and these in the form of images), though paradoxically these are memories of things that never happened. They arrive in the mind already packaged. Thus we have constant declarations by writers, painters, sculptors ('I simply carve it out of the stone, it's already in there') and composers that they are more spectators, receptors, witnesses of their work than creators in the deliberate sense.

The memories or images are already packaged for the artist 1) in respect of their being endowed with an aura of pain, anguish or pleasure and 2) in their being precisely physical or figurative. The same applies to every medium including music. It is like a genetic choice, far below the level of the conscious mind, over which the artist has no pre-control whatever.

Creative writing schools can teach techniques, and identify these through comparison, but they cannot charge memories with overwhelming force or reorganise the perceptive packages of a whole lifetime. Nor can they create that

peculiarly organic self-identification with his medium that we find in the born artist. Right back in Berthold Brecht's childhood we shall find the aptitude to dramatise everything, in Henry Moore's the love of touching and changing surfaces, in Kokoshka's a powerful sense of colour and form.

Yet no aptitude for writing, painting or whatever it is will be enough either. For in the born artists, if we are to trust their almost universal accounts, their work never begins from aptitude but from a certain inner charge that demands expression at all costs and even defies the lack of aptitude, training, technique and knowledge. Thomas Mann once said that he began as a writer because of his painful inability to form German sentences. It is compulsion rather than design that gives the final work its hypnotic and durable quality, and the lack of it which makes lesser work fashionable for a day. It is the hypnosis of the 'compelled' work that enables it to cross geographical frontiers and to survive translation. It may be even more striking in validity centuries after its author's death.

VI. 'BLISS WAS IT IN THAT DAWN TO BE ALIVE'

It is difficult when reading biographical accounts of great artists to avoid the impression that an ecstatic element pervaded their lives with singularly little interference from hardship or even destitution.

Again and again we read of ecstasies interpolating themselves with no explanation or preamble into periods of suffering, in an artist's life. No one could have had more daily and consistent (and escalating) disappointment than William Blake: but here is England's most visionary and blissful artist and poet of the nineteenth century.

It is as though a memory of some lost racial bliss were alive in the artist from birth. He can plunge into the darkest experiences for his material and yet come up sane. The powerful unconscious charge of the enduring work of art, the blissful element that transfuses it, both seem to be connected with the artist's identification with an inner perfection immune to moral judgement, pain or self-destruction.

VII. IS ART A SKILL?

The nineteenth century philosophy of the lone genius became unpopular this century with universal education; and art came to be seen as a skill like any other. It was thus that the 'creative process' came to be analysed and discussed.

There was a great need in people, now that their right to express themselves had been acknowledged, to go to art for that very element of bliss which they felt in the artist's

personality and which emanated indirectly from his work. Audiences say of Charles Bukovsky that he looks and sounds hideously ugly at his readings until he reads his verse and then he becomes 'an angel'. It is this peculiar self-transmutation in the artistic process that fascinates and allures. Something therapeutic seems to be at work in the most offensive artistic productions; and naturally enough the idea comes about that if you could train yourself to be an artist you could thereby get the bliss and the therapeutic effect.

But for the artist it works the other way round. The bliss is what moves him to work, not vice versa. He can perceive it in the pain, the darkness. Basically there is no darkness for him. Pain and darkness are so to speak the inner core of the bliss, and the bliss the inner core of the pain, in an endless unfolding of the 'veils of illusion' that the Indians describe as maya. He never entered the so-called creative process as a deferral system, namely to defer the suicide or the feelings of misery or failure. He was led into it by a great constructive sense of his inborn powers, a forceful conviction of his capacity to overcome obstacles and render even destitution bearable by the absurd means of working day and night at something he might not be able to sell. How William Blake found the money to print his own books and lithographs was a source of wonderment to his friends and not least to his wife.

The democratic interest in the creative process seems, however, quite as much a search for identity as for bliss. Many of the books published today are efforts to objectify a life felt not to have properly existed. We must expect that as society becomes fragmented, and ethnic, family, religious and sexual ties break down, more and more people will feel that unless they have a book to their name they aren't fully alive.

Such people frequently describe their first efforts as 'taking the lid off the garbage'. These words fitly reveal the suicidal or self-rejective mood.

Again and again in therapeutic sessions people say, "I realize I've never been fully alive" or "It was always dangerous for me to be myself" or "If I revealed who I was, I would not be liked". It is here that a secret conviction may arise, "I am a creative genius and deeply unhappy because unrecognised." It may be a false assumption but this isn't the point: it enables one to defer genuine self-confrontation.

VIII. CREATIVITY AS VENGEANCE

At this point the creative effort becomes an exquisite act of vengeance. The parents, relatives and friends of the writer, on behalf of whom the original self was abandoned, become, once the book is published, a slavish audience.

One enters a 'hall of fame', ridiculous though the idea may be, and hopefully one may occupy this hall for many years after one's death, quite as if one were to be embalmed.

Sometimes these pseudo-programs are rejected. One of our clients, in a book on her experiences as a Hollywood star, writes that the real joys of her life in Hollywood were her home, her husband and her children. She took a long time convincing her publishers that she could hardly pervert her happy story into an unhappy one, which they seemed to want on the grounds of market appeal. The unique thing about her book was indeed the fact that it didn't embrace the pseudo-programs of Hollywood life and therefore the unhappiness which these entail.

That is, she didn't defer her life. She was like a roulette player who makes a big win and then avoids the casinos. But the usual story is that the hunger for success, far from abating with success, is further stimulated by it. What the success was designed to defer continues to be deferred, until, quite frequently, a surfeit of success brings the whole structure down in ruin and the suicide can no longer be put off: there is either physical suicide, nervous breakdown or a collapse of talent. The writer or artist or actor begins to repeat early formulae and even to look back on the days of obscurity with nostalgia. The bad days become good days, because failure may in the end be a more effective deferral than success, as it is forever striving.

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Since the evidence for all this is so striking and universal, the question arises, is a deferral system inherited, namely, built into our mental structure from early childhood? Certainly the Christian religion might be called a deferral religion, however little support it may have received for the deferral idea from Christ himself. That is, heaven and hell, in the Christian cosmology, take place after death, and life is seen as a struggle to attain the one and avoid the other, rather than something to be lived for itself. Today we unknowingly accept mental structures that derive from the deferral heritage.

In this heritage, bliss was early to disappear, to be labeled heresy. Ecstasies in the religious sense were becoming extremely unpopular in power circles in the sixteenth century. Philip II of Spain, the greatest power in Europe and the strongest influence on the pope, instigated the persecution of the adumbrados, for whom ecstatic states were the substance of devotion. Yet Philip II's father, Charles V, Holy Roman Emperor, had ecstasies and considered them a normal part of the devout life.

This conflict---between ecstasy and dogma---was precisely the same as that between the Renaissance, with its concern for the 'perfect man' in everyone, and the Counter Reformation which followed it, which saw grace as something that had to be won with pain and anguish. Jesuits were disciplined to imagine themselves burning in hellfire, being licked by the flames.

In this conflict one side wanted (and claimed to experience)

perfection and ecstasy now, the other side wanted it deferred. One side marvelled at the miracles and splendours of life, the other scorned this 'vale of tears'. It was the same in the Hindu world. One side celebrated life as a manifestation of love in all its forms (bhakta); the other called it maya, or veils of illusion, to be cast aside as soon as possible.

What could reveal more of a suicidal drive than this life-deferral system at work in people's minds for so many centuries, in both east and west?

Is it why people couldn't expect to live more than an average thirty or forty years in Europe before the eighteenth century (when theology began to lose its hold on the western mind)? For the impression naturally grew up, under the life-deferral system, that life was a sort of conveyor belt rushing us all precipitately from birth to death in order to get us enrolled either in heaven or hell.

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Today's secular society still contains the shadows of the early cosmologies. Our minds continue in the same depressive mode. And modern self-improvement therapies are frequently reassertions of the deferral system, perpetuating the depressive state simply by declaring that the self is anything but perfect.

With the collapse of any serious belief in heaven and hell today, we are left with a sense of life as a mad conveyor belt over which we have no control, and which seems to have no reason at all for existing, except as a mechanism for rushing us from one place to another as fast as possible (and filling us with the terror of arriving).

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It may seem absurd to expect that the publication of a book, our names on the credits of a film, or an exhibition of canvases with colours on them could in some way halt the conveyor belt, but at this point, especially with the end of the world facing us every day as a plausible fact, we snatch at small mercies.

The deferral of 'real' life (in the religious sense) until after death has meant the deferral of life here and now, within the organism, so that we seem to be watching ourselves, our feelings, from a distance---and it is the cortical part of the brain-system that does the watching.

IX. A DREAM DEFERRED

Is there some guiding principle in bliss which, once it lapses, leaves the organism peculiarly undefended, so that an extra defence of over-cortical activity is now required to redress the balance?

The idea grew up in eighteenth century Europe (the epoch of encyclopedism) that we govern our lives consciously. But, apart from the fact that the working of our organisms is largely autonomic, the three parts of the cerebral or outer brain---namely, the sensory, the motor and the associative or judgemental---are largely receivers of information, and more sifters, analysers, organisers and judges than initiators (even motor initiation is determined by needs and motives outside that area). But, despite the facts, the idea that we govern and determine our lives consciously has a much stronger hold today than ever before.

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Current brain researches tell us more. They demonstrate that the amygdala and the hippocampus, the two memory areas in the limbic system, supply the cortex or conscious part of the mind with memories that are already packaged, both as to their durability (namely, whether they are to be long-term or short-term memories) and their flavor, quality and meaning.

For instance, a memory may appear suddenly to the conscious mind without any conscious provocation. It may, for no good reason that the conscious mind can see, appear poignant and significant. It may return to the mind again and again, yet never signify its inner meaning or the reason for its regular appearance. Its atmosphere may be one of anxiety. Yet there may be an inexplicable admixture of pleasure or mystery. A certain street, a certain shop perhaps, at a certain period of childhood: but few other details. There are no surrounding thoughts or associations. The memory is simply there, significant but without apparent meaning.

Now who is processing these memories, behind the conscious mind, and delivering them from time to time to that conscious mind, without warning or prior consultation?

Obviously there is a vast world of invisible activity going on behind the conscious self which nevertheless takes decisions and makes connections long before the cortex is aware of it (if it ever becomes aware of it).

We are obliged to believe that a thinking individual is at work behind the conscious mind.

For sometimes memories appear precisely when they are needed. They 'come from nowhere'. They are 'brainwaves' or 'flashes of inspiration'. They happen even to the scientists who don't believe in them. Major breakthroughs of this kind, from Kekule's demonstration of the benzene molecule to Otto Loewi's first demonstration that chemicals are involved in neural action, have been happening in science since the first mediaeval guidelines for scientific procedure were laid down.

Who is this 'thinking individual' of whom we are largely unconscious, though he is our very self?

Do we have access to it through bliss? Does this account for that 'compelling' action we find in the genuine artistic imagination? Is the reason that over-cortical activity creates confusion in the nervous system the fact that the blissful connection has been lost?

X. THE LOST IDENTITY

The blissful smile we see on the Etruscan, early Greek and Egyptian heads can be seen today, from time to time, on the faces of those who meditate. A blissful feeling is unquestionably one of the effects of 'successful' meditation. But is this more than a feeling of repose? Could we obtain as much by sitting quietly in a chair rather than in the prescribed lotus position? What is the function of the straightened spine in the classic meditation posture? Why should the eyes be closed?

Actually not all types of meditation require the eyes to be closed. There is a tantric meditation requiring one to stare into the flame of a candle until its outlines are blurred and finally disappear. Yet the effect is not so different from having the eyes closed, since the mind undergoes the same kind of change. That is, the cerebral cortex seems to withdraw, fall into a slower rhythm. The question here is, does it do so in order to make repose possible? Does a 'successful' meditation involve the dethronement of the conscious, thinking mind?

Certainly the Indian yogi advises the meditator to 'let go of the mind'. But the word 'meditation' comes from meditare, which means to ponder or think. That is quite confusing for a westerner---he must sit down and ponder or think without thinking. He sits in the lotus position and finally may reach a state of great repose. But he is still thinking, perceiving. There is simply no way in which the conscious mind, while conscious, cannot think.

Also the westerner, compared with the oriental, is over-active and over-mental. The moment he sits down his thoughts begin to race (unless he can catch himself very early in the morning). Is that meditation? Or has he misunderstood? Should he be thinking nothing at all? So he tries to think nothing at all and this isn't possible because while trying to think nothing at all he is thinking about not thinking, and therefore thinking rather harder than usual. Sometimes he emerges from his meditation confused, if not irritable or downright angry.

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The object of meditation is dhyana, which means the cessation of all outward impressions. And this means roughly the equivalent of what for us would be unconsciousness or fainting, though of a highly specialised kind. Special effects require special techniques. It cannot be done alone. This is why oriental tradition lays so much emphasis on the guru. A teacher is required not only to guide the subject but to create the trust needed for deep relaxation. This is why dhyana is called 'the easy way', as opposed to the 'hard way' of total renunciation. In dhyana you simply cease to be aware of what is going on around you. You cease breathing. When you stir again you feel 'I don't know where I've been'. The subject soon recognises that it is the most remedial state he has ever been in. And during these brief 'absences' extraordinary changes take place in the organism.

Some of the changes will be subtle, others dramatic. A promiscuous person may find himself celibate for a long period of time while a celibate person may suddenly find a mate. When the dhyanic experience is repeated over a period of weeks or months the subject may have the strange sensation that a new life is coming about before his eyes, yet emanating from inside him, so that, while participating in it, he is also a spectator or witness. The conscious processes have little or nothing to do with it. Sometimes it will appear to him, if he is sensitive, that for the first time he is getting the life he always needed (rather than 'wanted').

* * *

Our clients who undergo this process (we ourselves use a finely modulated breathing technique) experience first a destructuring of their goals and programs, second the collapse of suicidal 'plots' rooted deep in the past and hitherto largely unconscious, third an ability to receive information not indicated or prepared for by the cortex. In the words of one client, "Five years of psychoanalysis seem to have taken place in a few weeks, without verbal exchange".

A remarkable rejuvenation may take place. When the cortex has become used to not demanding explanations, devising strategies or clinging to structures, a repose begins to govern the organism which manifests in new breathing patterns, and subjects say they feel they 'fit into their skins' for the first time. They are content to be themselves.

Dhyana can only come about in silence and seclusion, and its very subtlety may be the reason why it failed to survive the upheavals of the Graeco-Roman world, and was thus unknown to the desert fathers. Pythagoras may well have undergone such an initiation in Egypt. It would explain why he was told by the priest to 'let go of the mind'.

Was the loss of this technique in ancient Greece the cause of that civilisation's intellectual philosophies, which dominated first Roman and then Christian thought? Did its loss allow the over-development of the cortex to the point where, today, over two thousand years after the dhyanic process ceased among the generality of mankind, we have a situation in which the individual is entirely helpless, and a science so theoretical that it has actually worked against natural law and produced an endangered environment?

The most difficult thing for anyone undergoing the dhyanic process is to believe that his mind doesn't have to monitor or register, much less motivate, the changes taking place in his organism and his life: so deeply has the cartesian I think therefore I am penetrated our beings.

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XI. THE 'ANTENNA' EFFECT

It seems that the creative genius can recall that state

of 'second birth' without having experienced the dhyanic process directly and without, certainly, knowing its benefits. The bliss experienced as a result of that process is, in him, a spasmodic occurrence.

But there is another dhyanic feature which he shares unknowingly, and this is the 'antenna effect' which many, though not all, dhyanic subjects experience in the course of their initiation: they become aware of receiving information which is paradoxically 'from outside' and yet intimately apposite to their own situation, so that they may suddenly be shown (usually in the course of a dhyanic session) how to resolve a work problem, or enhance a relationship; or an unexpected new path may be indicated. The 'antenna' (noticed by Itzhak Bentov in his ballistocardiographical researches with meditational subjects) simply picks up a strong current of initiative and courage which might hitherto have been lacking in a certain area. Here we are very close to the ranging intuition of the creative genius which takes him as if by accident to scenes and spectacles unknown to his conscious mind.

Are our clients who ask to know more about the creative process really asking for this 'antenna', and for the other benefits of the dhyanic process which they may dimly perceive?

The 'antenna' need not operate consciously. Some subjects never become aware of it. But in either case there is a strong sense of being guided.

The statements quoted in the first section of this proposal are those of people searching for guidance inside themselves. They expect it, try to assert it but do not find it. An unpleasant inner process has taken hold of them---fears and anxieties and unaccountable sorrows---over which the cerebral cortex cannot exercise control, though continually we are told that it is the only control we have.

If we as a race have been without the 'information service' and guidance from inside our own nervous systems for the past two thousand years, is it a surprise that those two thousand years present a cataclysmic picture of continual massacres, plagues, persecutions, pogroms and diasporas, decimations and torturings, coups d'etat, financial crises, famines involving millions of people, riots and revolutions and bitter patricidal feuds?

We may believe in the nineteenth century idea of progress but the fact is that history in those two millenia has repeated itself with tiresome regularity. Fifteenth century Florence, the first embryo democratic state, was hit by the same kind of financial crisis and unemployment that bedevils modern government. It is why the cathedral remained unfinished.

XII. A DIALOGUE WITH DEATH

Is this the picture of a race intent on doing away with itself at all costs?

We began to suspect, in our work with clients, that this

might have something to do with the suicidal tendencies we were observing almost every day, and which psychotherapies typically attribute to personal problems.

When the cortex is constantly claiming control, though manifestly unable to exercise it, it seems to create a deep imbalance in the human cell not unlike the working of cancer. The organism appears decidedly confused---and it would not be surprising if, in this confusion, unable to find in life any of the promised pleasures (even the most publicised ones, the sexual), it should want to do away with itself. And escape is difficult. Any attempt to reconstruct life, any venture into 'creativity' will, when the directives come from the cortex, exacerbate the difficulty and drive the suicide deeper, often by simply hiding it.

Guided by the cortex tentatively, absurdly, spasmodically and erratically, the organism, because unable to work according to its own pregenitally established functions, rejects itself. It may do so in one desperate physical act, but more commonly it is a moment-by-moment self-rejection which may express itself in continual guilt. This guilt may lie at the tail-end of every thought, decision, pleasure.

A British actress: 'I feel guilty about everything I do. If I'm reading a part for a future production I feel underneath I should be learning my lines for a current production, but if I do that I then feel I should be doing the other. If I'm lecturing in Iowa about Shakespeare I feel I should be on the stage doing my proper job, though in fact I will be on the stage in a couple of weeks. It seems I just can't let myself alone, whatever I'm doing.'

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Today medicine is moving out of what might be called its theological phase---from the idea that infections simply seize the body in the form of a hostile and implacable Providence, into a lively sense of the body's auto-immune system.

Dr MacFarlane Burnet's theory of 'immunological surveillance' says that we are surrounded, indeed bombarded by all possible diseases every moment, but our auto-immune system surveys these constantly and protects the organism against them. Sometimes that immune system breaks down, either wholly or in relation to certain diseases. It is possible that senility and 'natural' death long before the 'Hayflick limit' of 110/120 years of age may be due to such a breakdown.

In the dhyanic process, however, the immune system seems to become revitalised, and Burnet's theory seems closely related to the 'electrical scanning' that goes on in dhyanic sessions. If much greater longevity was achieved in certain ancient societies, was it due to knowledge of this process?

More than this, does the rejection of the self involve a lapse or weakening of the immune system, much as a shock or disappointment will sometimes induce an infection? Is it possible to envisage such total self-rejection that the immune system breaks down altogether?

We have a dramatic example of the collapse of the immune system in the so-called 'gay plague'. The medical name for this is AIDS, that is to say, Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome. Two diseases under this heading are a cancer called Kaposi's sarcoma and a lung disease called pneumocystis carinii pneumonia, both of which tend to be lethal.

In choosing the name AIDS the medical profession is saying that the disease or group of diseases is not contagious except for people who for one reason or another have lost their power to immunise themselves against disease. Secondly, it is saying that homosexuals in particular are prone to a breakdown in the auto-immune system.

There have been to date about 1400 cases of AIDS, thirty or forty percent of which have been fatal. Some victims die with remarkable speed, in a few days, others over a period of months. Only medication that could miraculously revive the immune system would save those cases. But such a medication doesn't exist. AIDS started in New York, and spread. Among the cities it spread to was San Francisco, which has a very large homosexual community. Out of the 1400 cases 236 have occurred in San Francisco, 71 of them fatal.

When doctors in San Francisco have tried to discuss the dangers of the situation in the gay community they have often met with anger, especially after suggesting that casual sex, under present circumstances, is dangerous and to be avoided at all costs. What is interesting for our purposes is that some doctors are saying, despite newspaper reports to the contrary, that casual or street sex among homosexuals has escalated since the scare began.

Here we see not simply an immune deficiency at work but a suicide syndrome in full and overt operation, and we may not be unjustified in connecting the two, not simply for homosexuals but for the human race.

Herpes is rarely fatal, but in some ways it presents as many hazards for heterosexuals as AIDS does for homosexuals, and the connection with casual sex remains valid in both cases. Herpes has a way of lingering, especially in the female organism, for many years, and so distressing are its effects, so painful its connection with the sex-act, that it may be no less a 'plague' than AIDS, particularly if it continues to spread at the present rate.

Now the sex-act is frequently an antidote to fear, indecision, guilt. It is, as the classical psychologists point out, incompatible with a state of anxiety, but once this state diminishes sexual activity appears not simply a source of release in a pent-up situation but a balm and comfort much like a regression to the security of the mother's arms. The sex-act may also be the last resort of an organism unable to find comfort, pleasure or repose in anything else.

At the anatomical source, so to speak, the suicidal element seems to be working quite as much as in the mind. And the operation is racial rather than personal, that is to say in terms that invite the use of the word 'plague', rather than conditions that invite personal analysis of the kind undertaken by the classical psychologists.

Again and again, in psychology, we return to the personal problem as if it were the crux of the matter. Millions of

people engage in workshops, private analysis, group therapy, to get at the root of a matter which may not be personal at all. While we continue to disregard the racial suicide at work in each one of us, that suicide must surely not only remain but, because more and more deeply hidden, intensify until it comes about physically in the form of a 'global accident' or a 'natural catastrophe'.

We are helpless before our racial problem because all we can do, in our intellectual tradition, is to produce more intellectual blueprints on the matter, that is, encapsulate all our distresses into theory, which then exacerbates the suicide no one is looking at.

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The organism seems to repair itself most efficiently at times of deep, and if possible blissful, repose. Dr Richard Cutler in his gerontological researches is finding that deep relaxation and the 'storing' of superoxide dismutase (and thus optimal functioning in the immune system) may be connected. Without repose the immune system is both deprived and over-taxed. The individual is cast about in a sea of relentless undercurrents which then require continual analysis and strategizing.

But repose is by no means an easy matter. It cannot be defined as muscular relaxation, much less as sleep, but as a natural function of the organism when under its 'proper guidance', that is when optimal oxygen-utilisation at the cellular level is taking place.

* * *

The dhyanic process could be defined as allowing the auto-immune system to take the organism over, without interruption of hindrance from the outer brain. But there is a way in which that immune system may be connected with the sense of a perfect self, in an echo of the humanistic 'perfect man' and the Hindu 'I am God'. Essentially, it means seeing any situation into which the organism falls---from depression to physical distress---as remediable, indeed as a preliminary to the solution that will follow if there is no undue cortical organization. No one studying the human organism, particularly the brain, can fail to see what a miraculously self-sufficient system we have. Over four hundred different chemicals, or rather electro-chemicals, have been discovered to operate in neurotransmissions. Thousands of instructions, perhaps millions, are transmitted in our bodies every day to make balance and disease-resistance possible. To take one tiny example, when we ingest salt our brains secrete an extra supply of vasopressin, and this conveys an instruction to the kidneys to retain water.

It is we who do the instructing, though we are hardly conscious of it. Our instinctive resistance to this idea---namely that we are instructing our kidneys chemically to retain water---is due to centuries of tradition which said that 'I' or 'we' means the conscious mind.

That is, we have theorised ourselves so far away from our own processes that we are even in fear of them. The here-and-now is one of the things emphasised by self-improvement programs. But unless it goes beyond an intellectual or verbal formulation, no program can induce that state of invulnerable well-being which is what we mean by a sense of the here-and-now. Blocking this state is the obsession with intellectuality which has bedeviled our civilisation from the beginning. This intellectuality is in fact an improper use of the intellect based on significant scientific errors. It derives from a major mistake about the nature of the human organism---namely that we control our lives, and our environment, exclusively by conscious and deliberate thought. The result of that mistake is that we have decidedly lost control of both.

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A few days ago a client who had just sent her first manuscript out to publishers reported the following:

"My friend said in a letter to me that the letters I'd written him had suicidal overtones. My reaction to that was one of indignation--- I'd already been through that one; a couple of years ago I thought of suicide. I know I'm not going to kill myself..." (Tears appeared in her eyes, then, after a pause, she went on:) "I've been living according to resolve, not according to what's pleasure-able."

Then she told us that she had recently developed a condition approaching leukemia and AIDS: her red blood count had dropped to around 1500 to 5000 ratio to the white blood cells. This was told with nervous smiling.

LENGTH: 80.000 words.