

So let's look at our perception of free will once again. Observing other animals, it seems that their decision-making process is much more direct than ours, more like how we pick up the coffee cup when our attention is riveted on the morning newspaper: it just kind of happens by itself with no second-guessing. Now let's say we've finished the first cup of coffee and (with our mind lingering on something in the newspaper) we pick up the empty cup and—obeying the dictate of our will—head for the kitchen, whereupon we accidentally hit the cup against the countertop which knocks it out of our hand in the general direction of the other hand which tries to catch it, but fails. At this point, one of our legs shoots out enough so that the cup's fall is cushioned before it hits the floor. The actions of our hand and leg in response to the unexpected and unwilled trajectory of the cup amaze us with their supernal celerity. There was no exercise of the will here; our bodies react automatically to such emergencies, and with astounding speed. From this it would seem that the "will" is a special case of the wheel of organic process going from thinking to action phase where there is a choice to be made between more than one course of action and the time in which to make that choice. Choices made instantaneously cannot be considered free. If this is true, the pre-pondering of alternatives—thinking—is essential to the operation of the will. Imagined outcomes usually figure prominently in these deliberations. But if the chosen course of action appears to promise a clearly superior outcome, its choice seems more mechanical and less "free". The more closely we examine the operation of the will, the more intentional volition seems to be a special case of mechanisms which operate automatically except in neural environments with enough headroom (and time) to consider alternatives.

In all of nature, we alone have a problem about telling the truth. Having no problem about employing theft and violence is what is meant by "the law of the jungle".

About here is where I should take a mea culpa break. I cop to the sophomoric schlock I mock. The Ivies to the rescue, please. I'm about at the point where I need to enroll in Philosophy 301 in order to acquire the ability to fully embrace the intellectual peregrinations underlying the blasé sophistication our times. Actually read "Thus Spake Zarathustra"? What questions are merely naive and what questions are genuinely jejeune? Is free will swill? Between the eater and the eaten, which is the negative and which is the positive? I need answers, and I need them *now*!

though a disheartening blow to our egos, presents not nearly the body blow to the foundation of our life-guidance systems as did the death of God.

Nineteenth and early 20th century philosophers, theologians, scientists, orientalists, and psychologists rose to the challenge posed by the demise of Deism with a variety of sometimes interlocking, sometimes antithetical alternatives. The passive meditation of the Buddha jostled with Nietzsche's will to power of the superman.

From this welter of contradictory constructs, a few commonalities emerge. Where morality is thought to be a valid concept—not a game tied to the Deist illusion—three prime categories of universal moral concern emerged: violence, theft, and falsehood. I find it meaningful to relate these three categories of proscribed behaviors to the three phases of the wheel of organic process: acting, feeling, and thinking. One further category of universal moral imperatives relates to the longer cycles of human life and their key passages: birth, maturation, courtship, marriage, family, and death. Although cultural norms concerning violence, theft, and falsehood vary, the long-cycle imperatives come with considerable cultural variables attached. The point here is that there is a demonstrable universal in-built moral component to human consciousness rooted in our basic nature as an organism that is independent of any specific religious tradition. (That's why it so pisses me off when Bush proclaims human freedom to be a gift from God.) Am I sounding like some crazed Chomskyite off into the semiotics of conscience yet?

But embracing the concept of morality requires an acceptance of the operational reality of free will—a premise at odds with the reductive heuristic paradigm. Or is it? I suppose that one could make some sort of argument that if all the data, to the full extent of its multitudinous minutiae, could be amassed, it could be shown that although all human behavior is a mechanical and precisely predictable resultant of the various vectors involved, the subjective impression on a consciousness capable of self-reflection is one of internal independence. Such a consciousness perceives its will as being like a stick employed to goose along the hula-hoop of the wheel of organic process because it perceives itself as being able to stand outside of the organism it is attached to. This perception, though illusory, becomes an operative factor at the scale at which it is relevant, which is the behavior of the whole organism in relation to others of its kind.

What I'm getting at is that I'm having a hard time reconciling the very deep basis of Chomsky's political views in a morality, that to be meaningful, must be based on free will, with his belief in the exclusively reductive basis in knowledge. Parenthetically, Chomsky's reported rejection of inductive reasoning ("For any datum there are infinitely many theories that can explain it.") I also find troubling. This distrust seems to be invalidated, at least by the physical sciences, as long as one accepts their conclusions as localized, conditional, and approximate. I mean, that's good enough for me. His position, if correctly interpreted, becomes more apposite in the life sciences, particularly the scientific examination of human behavior, a realm within which the study of semantics dwells (I assume). Also, the domain of investigations into the paranormal, sussing Jungian symbology, and the perfection of public-opinion polling.

elements takes our picture out of three-dimensional freeze-frame mode and sets it in motion in the four dimensions of the real world, although our subjective understanding of that real world—even after having seen all the parts laid out on the garage floor—is still illusory. Illusory or not, subjective experience is the only gateway to reality we have. This, of course, casts doubt on the veracity of the reductive enterprise—garbage in, garbage out—but the ultimate nature of truth is not my concern here; I am by nature a cheerful approximator. My concern is more, "Can I make it through the intersection before the yellow light turns red?"

In terms of human consciousness, then, the utilities boards, pipes, and wires translate through our physical bodies into the alliteratively chosen categories of *hand*, *heart*, and *head* which are the physical agents of the three phases of the *wheel of organic process*, into the three primal functions: *acting*, *feeling*, and *thinking*. These three functions may each be usefully divided again by three. The catcher signals the pitch, the pitcher signals assent, he sets (thinking); the windup, the pitch, the follow-through (acting); he is alert to the consequences of the batters swing, he watches the ball sail over the center-field wall, his stomach sinks as he glances in the coaches direction (feeling).

Animals with non-self-reflective consciousnesses have, in a sense, a truer picture of their reality than we do because their mental processes are tied more closely to the primary business of their organism: the survival and reproduction processes that proceed at the molecular level. At some point, most likely as a result of our upright posture which freed the development of the opposable thumb (thus facilitating tool-making), combined with the development of a wide enough variety of vocal sounds to enable language, the need for enhanced neural processing capability to operate these systems favored mutations leading to a central bioprocessor large enough to escape the bounds of primary needs, thus enabling the experience of self-recognition. Interestingly, right along with the development of the first vocal abstract representations of the things in our environment, came the imputation to these things of anthropomorphosized spirits similar to the spirit they felt looking up at them from a still pond. Nearly universally, early humans also generalized a Great Spirit that had created the world and set in motion all of its constituent entities and the lesser spirits that animated them. Was this the primal illusion? Were early humans, in their un-tutored naivete possessing this newfound miraculous gift of the means to express a self-reflective consciousness, to employ that gift in the creation of error? And to do so universally?

In any case, along came Copernicus, Gallileo, Newton, and the Enlightenment, and suddenly Deists of all stripes were assaulted with the smugly impious assertion that the existence of God was a hypothesis of which we no longer had need. The universe—and more to the point, the human prospect—was no longer ruled by a force comfotingly like ourselves, but was a gigantic, infinitely complex machine, the laws by which it proceeded we would eventually master by picking it apart bit by bit. Heisenberg, Bohr, and Einstein shattered that illusion, but no matter; the mystery of the human prospect remained much the same. God was always as unknowable to us as the atmosphere is to the fish, anyway. That the ultimate nature of the material universe should prove similarly unknowable,

about the human organism—unique in all of nature—alleged to display this phenomenon. We humans are "really", as far as can reliably be determined, a complex orchestration of carbon-based molecules in continual motion and interchange, coiling and uncoiling, simmering along in a slow burn, metabolating friendly substances while rejecting or excreting unfriendly ones, all the while mindlessly plotting our replication. So that the staggering complexity of these billions of molecules may interact coherently, the electrical properties of certain compounds serve to link all parts of our organism to a central processor that monitors and directs the organism's activities. In our species, this central processor has grown so large that it has developed the capability of monitoring and directing its own activities. This function we call "human consciousness", but as loyal reductivists, we stoutly maintain that the stream of consciousness emanating from this humming, crackling organ is an illusion, or "epiphenomenon". To confound contrarian religionists, we smugly adduce the wisdom of the most ancient Vedic scripture to bolster our assertion that consciousness is the "play of Maya"; that is, illusion. One could also make similar points about other conceits, such as our putative "creativity" and "abstract thinking" capabilities, but I prefer to focus for the moment on the question of the validity of the notion of free will and the consequences which flow from its affirmation or denial.

That settled, we may proceed to assert that what we take to be "free" will is no different from the behaviors we observe in other species which can more or less be predicted on the basis of instinct, learned behavior, and stimulus/response. Again, these are highly complex phenomena reducible ultimately to chemical reactions and the flow of electrons. There is no reason to suspect that the same mechanisms are not the only causative agents at work in human decision-making other than the nagging subjective sense that at this moment I have the option of using this keypad as a blunt instrument in the cause of smashing in my monitor screen. But, you see, I didn't. I decided to see if I could balance it on my head instead. I determined—you'll have to trust me on this—that I can.

To proceed further in this line of investigation, I must take a moment to reach in the conceptual cupboard for the magic ingredient required to rescue this relentless reductivist recipe from realization as a rancid ragout of recondite ratiocinations. Onward, then, to boards, hoses, and wires. That is to say that our reduction of ourselves to a water-based stew of organic molecules is a mere shopping list without the patterns by which those chemicals are integrated into a functional whole. Since we can reliably be observed to be more of a process than a product (or if a product, one with a shelf-life fraught with ever-increasing anxiety), entropy decrees that we commandeer an outside source of energy—in our case, other organisms—and that we have a medium for the metabolism and circulation of these substances—water—and that we have a means of containing and regulating these fluids—integuments ranging from highly permeable membranes to solid bone—all controlled by an electrical network—the nervous system. Each of these three elements is absolutely necessary and absolutely incapable of doing the work of the other. Boards can neither contain water nor conduct electricity. Hoses buckle under a load and short-circuit electricity. Wires also lack stiffness and hollowness, but conduct electricity with ease. Each of these functions is integrated at the cellular level, and therefore find expression in the makeup of the total organism. Their addition to our list of constituent

Among the many shibboleths inflicted upon me by my demonic ex-wife, the Ivy League-educated, blue-blood former Playboy bunny, Christiana, was the notion that independent thinking is properly left to those qualified to undertake it. Those worthies are to be identified by their advanced degrees from the Ivys or their European counterparts, wherein defensible premises, legitimated knowledge, and peer-reviewed research/scholarship are dispensed with such rigor that the re-invention of the wheel, the invention of the square wheel, or the promulgation of untested hypotheses are effectively stopped in their tracks. Unprepped others, in this view, are to be regarded with suspicion, or better yet, ignored altogether. That the resultant thinking should be dubbed "independent" is, to me a source of some puzzlement. My father advised me, as a child, that the answer to my question about whether belief in God was justified or not, was that each individual is obliged to make up his or her own mind on the subjects of ultimate importance to the conduct of their own life because these are subjects upon which reasonable men had always disagreed. Here "men" is not just a thoughtless sexist pronoun, but a reflection of the assumption of the time that women would agree with "their" men. With the advent of feminism, of course, reasonable women are just as contentious as men, especially with each other, their children, or their husbands, which brings me full circle to Christiana. The point is, that I, like millions of others, though woefully unprepared by native intelligence, good breeding, and rigorous tuition, to suss out life's questions, must nevertheless have a go at it when two and two do not seem to be adding up to four.

This daunting burden was once again placed on these frail shoulders by the recent article on Chomsky in the New Yorker. Placed not, however, by the new need to introspect for symptoms of the Golden Calf syndrome, nor the reiteration that the Ivys come in infinite shades of clashing reds and greens. The clay feet of the exalted, as well as academic turf-wars among the mandarins, place no undue or unexpected burden on the well-practiced cynicism of the hoary. No, my perplexity lies elsewhere; it roils the seas on both sides of the isthmus of the secular consensus.

That Chomsky's intellectual gymnastics vault from a reductivist trampoline, is not only unsurprising, but—at least in the area of linguistic theory—reassuring. When human affairs are strained through the reductivist sieve, however, the residue can resemble an oleaginous goo. Mixed metaphors, did I? It was done only to cite one example of a reductionist explanation having to go the long way round the barn to demonstrate how and why the two statements not only make a clear distinction, but give a fairly good indication that the writer might have at least an approximate idea of the meaning of the term "reductive", without ever setting down the actual word.

The reductive imperative (if my approximation is in the ballpark) dictates that all generalities must either contain, or spring from, a multitude of facts which they either contain or from which they are derived. In this game, hitting a home-run scores no runs, but is akin to the "externality" of the economists. Thus, if I were a reductivist (which I most certainly am when balancing my checkbook or keeping my place in a tune) I would approach the question of free will, for instance, by calling attention to the known facts

perceived as equally hypocritical when proclaiming their dedication to the good of humanity.

But it gets still worse. Competition for money and power as the Master Game in which survival-need forces all to play a part, when instituted within a system of anarchic militarist nation-states, guarantees recurrent warfare. Again, like competition for money and power, warfare gives meaning to people's lives. Without it, heroism, honor, and the tales that extol them, would be relegated to historical legends with no venue for realization in contemporary lives. No fight, no fun.

Having isolated the institutionalized ideas underlying the sharing of the land—rent on land—and the medium of exchange—interest-bearing money as a store of value—as the culprits that impoverish, enslave, and will ultimately drive us to the brink of extinction, the question then becomes: What was the headset of those who put these practices in place? The answer: self-replicating money, and land as property, serve the interests of patriarchs in imposing (and then protecting) their power.

My thinking about the political economy neglected the position of Gandhi (and many others) that no important and lasting improvement in the state of humanity would ever result from purely structural arrangements without prior spiritual growth. I have no argument with that position, only that if humanity did evolve spiritually, the retention of the present structural arrangements would undo that evolution. Therefore, why not try to imagine what sort of structural arrangements would be appropriate to society at such a time. And that is what I succeeded in doing. I freely admit that, were such innovations to be put in place, the ethical constructs characteristic of the populations of advanced capitalist societies would undermine such innovations as surely as the present capitalist triumphalism undermines humanity's spiritual growth. When I consider contemporary American culture and the typical personal and interpersonal behavior it rewards, both as portrayed in the media and as experienced in person, I've become persuaded that efforts to make a more rational, equitable, and sustainable society are doomed in a society of ostrich-headed pigs.

So much for the context of my personal *isist* assessment. Of course, I am ignoring the impact of this context on the lives as musicians, but I leave that to ongoing discussions. Quite simply, the disappearance of the last shreds of youthful idealism signals the long delayed end of my much treasured adolescence and the beginning of a grumpy old age wherein I intend to continue to bow as little as possible to the pressures of American adulthood. But since the acquisition and retention of money and land is the only basis for an independent old age, I will henceforth, until infirmity strikes me down, prioritize their pursuit as if I believed in them. Otherwise, I will be resolute in seeking my own pleasure to balance the aches and pains of advancing years, as well as indulging a newfound kick of being of assistance to others when opportunities present themselves. All of which reminds me of Red Kelly's reaction to Don Lanphere's late-in-life conversion to Christianity: "How come all these born-again seem to come back as themselves?" Freddy Greenwell's suggestion for my epitaph—" real all-around kind of guy"—will probably always remain apt.

What my work sought to do was to keep that illusion alive. As long as capitalism "works", as long as a Cold War of nuclear terror is ended, the task for those whose sense of ethics commits them to the sustainability of the natural world in concert with a peaceful and sharing human population have no option other than to peck away at the capitalist edifice in an effort to deflect those energies fixated on money and power. Everyone "knows" that a new challenge to the global capitalist status quo would inevitably result in a new equivalent to the Cold War. Those with money and power don't surrender those privileges without a fight.

Therefore I've resolved to direct my creative energies into more benign channels. What better way to advance the worthy goals of a sustainable environment and social justice, on the personal level, than to embrace the poverty and impotence attendant on pursuing the life of the anonymous non-star jazz musician?

But as I pat myself on the back for this bit of existential sneakiness, I can imagine being accused of being the true product of smug Seattle passive-aggressiveness. If so, no contest. You see, what I had envisioned was the eventual end to the need for continual conflict with the privileged, since that seemed such a waste of time if it could be solved by structural arrangements in the protocols of government and finance that would prevent extremes of privilege from arising in the first place. I have succeeded in outlining a vision of an arrangement that would accomplish this goal. I now realize that the battle to protect privilege by those who have it, and to destroy it by those who don't, gives central meaning to the lives of the combatants. If the conflict were solved, what would these people do with their lives? Take up a musical instrument? We have enough competition already from untalented greed-heads.

But it gets worse. I have come to see the various analyses of the villainy of capitalism as lacking in depth: they neither question the validity of land possession which allows absentee ownership, nor the validity of usury-based money. People—and particularly all Americans regardless of class—cannot conceive of the possession of money (as well as its free convertibility into real estate) as anything but the most basic given. Anyone intimating otherwise is immediately suspect of fraud or lunacy. So what is the chant at the progressive rally? "What do we want?" "Money!" "Why do we want it?" "To pay the rent!" "What do we want?" "More money!!" "Why do we want it?" "To pay the interest on a mortgage!!" Both the free convertibility of money into anything we might desire, and unchallenged hegemony over a state-sanctioned area of the surface of Mother Earth, are universally held to be the bedrock fundamental rights and freedoms underlying the Constitution, rather than the enforcers of our slavery—which I have come to truly believe them to be.

The position of the free-market neo-liberals—that everybody is most effortlessly and fairly served by universal and continual competition for money and power—is, at least, unambiguous. Progressives, on the other hand, concern themselves with determining victim-hood and prescribing reforms. The positions and programs resulting therefrom then become territory over which they contest with each other. Thus both the right and left are fixated on the ongoing power struggle within their own camps. Each can be

## ISISM AND ITS DISCONTENTS—6/12/2000

My recent relocation to California was originally conceived as yet another attempt at definitive self-definition which is essential for anyone wedded, as I am, to the tenets of *isism*, a term, by the way, which my Microsoft Word Spellchecker Wizard informs me, is not in its puny little dictionary. The Isist Manifesto urges us all to go forth and create an Individualist-Centered Anthropomorphosized Reality. Like, who you *are* matters, man. You can keep all your options open only so long. If we don't create our own reality, the Universe will create it for us. Who we are is not a given. Nor is it a taken. It all depends on what the meaning of is is. Our President was very wise to make that observation, no matter the eye-rolling it occasioned. And in any case, eye-rolling is an effective exercise in the prevention of myopia. Therefore, careful attention to the details of another's utter self-absorption can be a win-win situation. I would be less than generous, then, to delay further the long-awaited results of my lucubrations.

But such speculations would be meaningless without placement in a context, in our case, the certain doom of our civilization, if not our species. I regard member automobile ride metaphors as tiresome, but some one recently used one that I thought was particularly apt. The writer likened the situation of contemporary humanity to that of passengers in a car speeding toward a brick wall at 100 mph in which they're fighting each other about who gets to drive, while the passengers aware of the danger are locked in the trunk.

As you may remember, I have put considerable time and mentation into the task of coming up with a few ideas to help mankind to keep from destroying itself. I have long recognized this as an unsuitable hobby for a jazz musician. Besides, who wants to get locked in the trunk? Last summer, in China, I realized that I was going to really have to take myself in hand, by which I mean to really get a grip on myself, because I never practiced anymore due to spending all my spare time at the computer lucubrating locally while generalizing globally. When I re-entered my normal Stateside reality I found I couldn't quite quit cold turkey. I rationalized that I had to tie up a few loose ends. In reality, I was obsessed. It was some kind of millennial fever, I guess. I was going to publish on the Web, and a movement would result—or something.

So one day about a month ago, I had gotten the ten or so essays that outlined my conclusions to a state that I felt was editor-ready. What a wonderful, if short-lived, feeling of accomplishment! Now I could devote myself to my music with undivided ardor! The feeling of accomplishment faded rapidly once I got outside my construct enough to put it into context with what I saw happening in the world. Until the point of completion, I had put the two viewpoints in airtight categories, because of the feeling that what I was thinking might be of significance because it seemed so "right". In fact, the actual world is too vast to be influenced much by any one idea, no matter how seminal. The steam-roller of human cultural evolution has developed a massive vector headed into the future on multiple paths that no agency of individual human intervention can do much about. When communism no longer jostled with capitalism, the illusion of possible forks in the road leading to the further evolution of the structure of society to one of a different and better kind (not that I ever thought that Marxism was that fork) shattered.