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# Practical Paradise: Ethics for a Modern Age

Anthony P. Davanzo  
*Claremont McKenna College*

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Claremont McKenna College

**Practical Paradise: Ethics for A Modern Age**

submitted to  
Professor James Kreines  
and  
Professor Robert Faggen  
and  
Dean Peter Uvin

by  
Anthony Davanzo

for  
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The primary purpose of any artistic work is to transcend the limits of ordinary communication. Art is argument. Art is communication in a transcendental plane. A plane where the parts of the artistic work equal something greater as a whole.

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Characters:

Peter: Young male in his mid 20s.

Percival: Peter's longtime friend. Also young male.

Lucy: A young woman. Very kind and very beautiful.

Narrator, Footnoter, & Stage Director: An entity existing with an omniscient perspective of the realm of the story.<sup>1</sup>

Setting: Tuesday. Outside. Peter is walking alone next to a river. The sound of the water is subtle, but present. A beautiful day.

Peter: [As he narrowly avoids stepping on small snake] Why are you on a suicide mission Mr. Snake? I'd really prefer not to hurt you, but you're making that rather difficult for me.

[A girl enters going the other direction]

Girl: [Laughing] Can you actually talk to snakes?

Peter: [Slightly embarrassed, but trying to play it cool] I can talk to anything actually.

Girl: [Still making fun of Peter] Right, but do they ever talk back?

Peter: [Playfully defiant] Sometimes they do! It depends if they think you're trustworthy or not. Like for instance, this snake doesn't trust you for a minute. He told me that— I'm sorry, what was your name?

Girl: I'm Lucy.

Peter: Ah Lucy, how delightful, I'm Peter. The snake told me that you, Lucy, are not someone to trust!

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<sup>1</sup> Thank you for allowing me to introduce myself and the other characters. As I described above, I am the narrator, the footnoter, the stage director, the omniscient knower and observer of all. I will be following, guiding, and helping Peter, Percival, and Lucy along their journey in this story. I will also often appeal to textual references to give Peter and Percival more context in their arguments. I, being a man of efficiency, will cite texts written by Friedrich Nietzsche with abbreviations as follows: *The Gay Science* (GS), *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (Z), *On The Genealogy of Morals* (GOM), *Beyond Good & Evil* (BGE), *The Twilight of the Idols* (TI), and *On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense* (OTLEMS). After those abbreviations I'll provide the specific section and sub section numbers that I'm referring to. I'll cite texts by other authors by referencing the entire title, author, and page number.

Lucy: Well it seems like you have a problem then because I'm telling you not to trust the snake. [Smiling] Do you trust the animals or do you trust me?

Peter: I'm really not sure if I trust either of you. I suppose I'll have to get to know both of you better?

Lucy: [Smiling] Well since the snake and I don't trust each other, I guess you can get to know us individually.

Peter: I suppose so. Well I'm engaged with the snake at the moment, but can I meet you here by this apple tree at the same time on Thursday?

Lucy: That sounds good to me.

[Lucy smiles and exits]

Peter: [Blissfully reflecting] Oh dear. She is quite wonderful.

Setting: Wednesday. A room. It's dark and raining outside. There is a thunder storm coming in. Peter is in an armchair reading a book.

[Percival enters from outside, oddly without a drop of water on his body]

Percival: Are you okay?

Peter: [Attentive to the book he's reading] Why wouldn't I be?

Percival: So you haven't heard the news?

[Peter ignores Percival and continues reading]

Percival: Well someone died...

Peter: [Still attentive to the book] People die every day.

Percival: But isn't it always sad when someone dies?

Peter: It's sad that people die in general. Obviously, a world without death would be a better world. What are you getting at?

Percival: Nothing. Just sharing that someone died.

Peter: Why? Why would you bring another raincloud to me, when it's clearly already raining?

Percival: I thought you liked hearing news.

Peter: About death!?

Percival: Well no. More just news in general.

Peter: [Staring frankly at Percival over the top of his book] Sometimes I question if you've stopped to think about the thoughts you're thinking.

[Pause. Percival slightly takes offense, but knows he's going to be the bearer of bad news so he shrugs it off]

Percival: She died from an aneurysm.

Peter: [Expressing mild concern] She...?

Percival: An aneurysm wouldn't be a bad way to go. I've heard it's pretty painless. And, *if* [Said with a smile, as if he's not afraid of death] we all have to go, then that's how I want to go: painlessly.

Peter: Do you know who it was?

Percival: Yes... But I don't know if you want to know. That's why I thought you might not be okay.

Peter: [Mildly frustrated] Who was it?

Percival: Well... You know how you said you met a nice girl named Lucy yesterday?

[Peter puts his book down on the table]

Peter: She died?

Percival: Well...yes and no.

Peter: [Entirely flat in his affect] How do you know? How did you find out?

Percival: [Somber] Well I was walking home and I saw an ambulance pull up to a store right in front of me. I asked someone who was walking out of the store what happened, and they said that someone had just collapsed and died. I asked if they knew who it was, and they said someone who had just moved into town, a girl named Lucy...

Peter: [A worried look in his face] But maybe it was a different girl named Lucy?

Percival: I don't think so, you said she was tall and blonde?

Peter: [Looking lost and confused] I don't believe you, she's still here, she's gotta still be here. We just met...

Percival: At least she died painlessly! [too enthusiastic for the circumstance, but trying to console]

[Pause. Percival is uncomfortable with how quickly Peter has become upset. Peter is brooding.]

Peter: What is this world we live in? Where death can happen to anyone at any-time. Is that all we have in this world? Randomness? Nothing logical, nothing rational, just pure randomness. Well I guess that's fair. I guess randomness doesn't favor anyone, it just screws everyone. She didn't even know she was going to die until the moment it happened. What if she had plans to do something great? What if she was going to save someone's life? She was hope...

Percival: [Calmly interjecting, trying to console] She sounded nice.

Peter: What if she was the one for me? What if we were going to figure everything out together... What if we were going to have the house and the family and the small shoes getting lost everywhere... The dramatic reenactments with dolls, and the small round faces that never seem to be clean. The pain in your feet from stepping on toys... The subtle smirks back and forth...

[Pause. Peter deeply exhales]

Peter: The world is black. The world is darkness. Nothing balances out all the terrible things that happen. The rapes, the murders, the school shootings, the natural disasters, the racism, the bigotry, the oppression. It's all here. It's all prevalent. It's everything. There is no hope in this world. There is death. There is disease. There is suffering.

Percival: But it's not all bad, Peter! Think about it! There is happiness to be had! There are people smiling everywhere! Look! Look at that picture! [Points to a picture of friends hanging on the wall]. Look at happiness! It's all perspective Pete. It's bad if you think it's bad, but it's good if you think it's good!

[The first crack of lightning is heard]

Peter: Manufactured. That's the nature of all happiness these days. People can't be happy on their own. The only thing they can find is diversion from their suffering.<sup>2</sup> Manufactured diversion. That's what all media is these days. People watch reality TV to be diverted by the suffering of others. People watch boxing to see individuals cause each other pain so they aren't reminded of their own. Or maybe they are reminded of their own. Maybe it's through this universal suffering that we all feel connected somehow... Maybe sharing our suffering is the only way to make things bearable.

Percival: [Calmly, almost to himself] I met a bear once.

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<sup>2</sup> I would direct you towards Pascal's *Pensees*. In *Pensees* Pascal argues that people find diversion from suffering and that's what they call happiness. I believe that that is the idea Peter is trying to get at.

Peter: Is life even worth living on this forsaken planet in this forsaken universe? Is the point of life just to live until you die? What good is that...

Percival: What about heaven?

Peter: What about it?

Percival: Well, where else do you think Lucy is right now?

Peter: Lucy *is* dead. She doesn't have any business being anywhere. In fact, I don't think she even has the capacity to "be" anything.

Percival: But, if she did have the capacity. Wouldn't she be in Heaven?

Peter: No. No she wouldn't be in Heaven because Heaven isn't real. Heaven is a false notion that some wickedly intelligent sonofabitch from the past invented so he could incentivize people to work without giving them anything. She wouldn't be in Heaven because heaven doesn't exist. In fact, nothing that religion tells us exists. There is no God willing the universe to be a specific way. It's all fucking random particles going in random directions and anything rational coming from that is coincidence. We're coincidence. We are the product of an infinite number of random freak accidents— particles on their random path, randomly colliding, to randomly be the cause of something. There is no order, there is no religion, there is no God, there is suffering at the hands of the only high power in this land—randomness.

Percival: [Somewhat defiantly] Prove to me that there isn't a God.

Peter: [Slaps Percival across the face, Percival takes it without response] Either he doesn't like you, or he doesn't want to prove himself to you.

Percival: [As if the slap didn't effect him] On the contrary I think he just proved himself. He let you express anger at me, and I didn't feel a thing.

Peter: What do you mean you didn't feel a thing? I slapped you across the face.

Percival: But I didn't feel it... because God didn't want me to!

Peter: What's the point Percy? Would it be better if God did exist? Would it be better if this terrible realm of suffering was in fact guided by a terrible oppressor? Would you want the highest power in the world to be one that lets the world look

like this? I suppose even if God does exist, it's better not to believe in him because being ignorant of the kid with a magnifying glass on the anthill is better than knowing your fate is to inevitably burn underneath his random gaze.

[Percival recognizes that Peter should be alone and exits to another room]

Setting: The same room later that night. There's a thunderstorm outside. Lightning is constant. Peter is standing.

Peter: [To himself] Why do people even believe in good? I believe that people could believe in a self-interested good. Water is good because it keeps me alive, but I don't think there's anything higher order going on there. Why would someone believe in the abstract notion of *the good*. I suppose if its just a counter to the bad, but then we have the same problem with defining bad. What does *good* even mean?

[Percival enters from another room in the house carrying an old leather book]

Percival: Feeling better Peter?

Peter: [Sardonically] Just considering how possible it is that good actually exists in this world. So yes. Much better Percy.

Percival: [Wishing to make his friend feel better] I heard you said you wanted to know what a word meant while I was in the other room so I brought you this dictionary if you wanted to look it up! What was the word?

Peter: Ha! If only you could just define the good from the words in that dictionary.

Percival: Well it says right here in this dictionary that good means blonde haired.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Peter is about to borrow a line of argumentation from Nietzsche's *On The Genealogy of Morals*. To discover what good and bad are actually worth, Nietzsche divides his genealogy into two categories of origin: that which originated from the master and that which originated from the slave.

For the masters, Nietzsche offers the German word for bad, *schlecht*, as the prime example of an objective term with subjective origin because it is "identical with *schlicht*" meaning plain or simple (GOM I, 4). Thus, the common man was designated as bad, not based on any of his own characteristics, but simply because he lacked the characteristics of the nobility. Furthermore, Nietzsche offers the comparison between the Latin word *Malus*, meaning bad, and the Greek word *Melas*, meaning black or dark. The similarity between the two words suggests that *Malus* subjectively originated from the distinction between the Aryan ruling class and their darker skinned subjects. Similarly, Nietzsche explains that *Fin*, Gaelic for good, was used both to distinguish someone's nobility and originally meant blonde haired—another clear example of subjective origin. The idea of a subjective, biased origin for an objective morality is entirely contradictory and therefore Nietzsche argues this morality is meaningless.

Nietzsche calls the second category of origin the "slave revolt in morality" and it is marked by the resentment of the "slaves", which fostered the creation of a separate, distinct moral system (GOM I, 10). Nietzsche argues that this resentment is a "need to

Peter: [Almost disgusted by the confusing thing his friend has just said] What?

[Lightning is seen out the window]

Percival: Yeah the word good comes from the Gaelic word that meant blonde haired and noble.

Peter: That can't be right?

Percival: Look right here! [Shows Peter the text]

Peter: [Scanning the text] What kind of dictionary is this?

Percival: Oh, an old one!

Peter: So the Gaelic notion of good was to distinguish nobility and it didn't have anything to do with a real moral system?

Percival: I suppose!

Peter: So this primordial notion of morality was fundamentally subjective?

Percival: I suppose. Isn't yours? Don't you think what's good is what is good for you and what's bad is what is bad for you?

[Lightning again, more intense]

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direct one's view outward instead of back to oneself", where your only goals are defending yourself from the external world, and justifiably lack inward focus (GOM I, 10). Nietzsche, argues that the man of resentment creates a notion of evil out of disdain for his enemies as opposed to the man of master morality who creates a notion of bad to contrast to himself. Likewise, the man of master morality creates a notion of good from himself and the man of resentment creates a notion of good to contrast his evil enemy (GOM I, 10-11). While the master category of morality is flawed because it is too subjectively focused, the slave category is further flawed because it is entirely reactionary and thus also too subjective to be the foundation for a true, objective morality.

It is important to recognize that the two categories of origin for morality that Nietzsche presents are themselves exactly in opposition to each other. The masters find good in themselves and the slaves find evil in the masters. Nietzsche does not suggest that the moral system we use is arbitrary, but rather, that it is necessarily biased and therefore absurd. Morality came from origins that were either entirely self-focused, or entirely externally fixated, neither of which could possibly be the source of a true, objective moral system.

Peter: This weather! And no. That would completely take away from the objectivity of morality. Subjective morality is cheap. If subjective morality were true, then Hitler and the entire Holocaust would've been morally acceptable because Hitler saw it that way.

Percival: Hmm. Well clearly Hitler was bad.

Peter: Exactly, so if you want to have a significant moral framework, then it must be from an objective point of view.

Percival: How can we find out what is moral then?

Peter: Well that's a good question, Percy. What does that dictionary say about the meaning of bad?

Percival: [Searching through the pages] Hold on... Let me find it... Ah! It says that bad comes from a German word meaning plain or simple.

Peter: [Again confused] What?

Percival: It also comes from a Greek word meaning dark or black!

Peter: So bad is also entirely subjective?

Percival: How do you figure? These seem to be objective qualities.

Peter: Percival, when you compare the plain and simple, and the black and dark against the noble and blonde haired you see that these are clearly subjective definitions.

Percival: Huh?

[Lightning, more intense]

Peter: [Shudders] I really hate lightning. The white, opulent nobility just called themselves good and the plain, darker skinned peasants were labeled bad. Neither of these origins provides for an objective idea.

Percival: I love lightning! It makes you feel like you're apart of something bigger... and so what does that even mean?

Peter: I'm not sure... It seems that we can easily call certain things objectively bad or immoral like rape or murder.

Percival: Right, and certain things good like...happiness or sunsets?

Peter: Sure certain things are good like happiness or sunsets. But, we still have the same problem because those are just examples of *a good*, and they don't define *the good*. And, here's an issue: whose happiness is more *good* mine or yours?

Percival: Well they're equal, aren't they?

Peter: Well I'll say this, Percy, in a world were everything is the same, but I get to pick if you're happier or if I'm happier, I wouldn't even hesitate to make myself happier. So, while it might be nice to think that they are equal, I don't know if even you believe that.

Percival: But, maybe you're just a bad person?

Peter: Why because I value my happiness? Wouldn't that be the point of happiness being *a good*?

Percival: But what if you value your happiness and I value my happiness, but we are still both objectively valuing happiness?

[More lightning, more intense]

Peter: This storm needs to pass! And sorry, Percy, but that's subjectivism again because the happiness that is being valued depends on the person! Remember, a subjective or relative moral framework doesn't do us any good because it allows things like the Holocaust to become morally acceptable.

Percival: Well, is it possible that there is no moral framework? Maybe it's something that we can't comprehend as humans. Like it exists, but it's bigger than us. Like lightning!

Peter: [Struck by the profundity of what his companion just said] That could be something...

Percival: Lightning?

Peter: [Thinking deeply] No moral framework...

Percival: Well, no, I wasn't really going for that. I was trying to say that it's not something we can comprehend. Something bigger than us, like God!

Peter: [To himself, no longer paying attention to Percival] It makes sense... We had to create morality, it wasn't something that existed before the cognizant human being... It is all made up...

Percival: No, no, no— didn't you just agree that there are certain things that are good and certain things that are bad?

Peter: [Snapping back to focus] Right, but then we found out that good and bad can't possibly mean the what they appear to because the very origin of these ideas is flawed. And, I also said it *seems* that certain things are good and bad. But, if we remove good and bad altogether then we get something interesting! Then we get something closer to the truth!

Percival: The truth? How is that true? Don't you just become a horrible person if you don't believe in good and bad? Isn't that what a serial killer thinks? This can't possibly be what you want.

Peter: No serial killers lack empathy; they don't lack morality. It's that they don't feel bad about what they do, not that they don't recognize it as "morally" wrong.

Percival: But what about that gut feeling that you get when bad or good things happen? Isn't there something motivating that?

Peter: Percival, if you saw a drowning infant and you knew that you could save it, but it would be at the expense of some brand new shoes you just bought that cost hundreds of dollars, would you still save the infant?<sup>4</sup>

Percival: Of course! What kind of silly question is that?

Peter: When was the last time you donated to charity?

Percival: Yesterday! I gave a nickel to colon cancer at the grocery store!

Peter: When was the last time you donated to starving youths in developing countries?

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<sup>4</sup> Here Peter is bringing up the famous dilemma Peter Singer presents in his work *The Drowning Child and the Expanding Circle*. Singer argues that we are morally obligated to save a drowning child, despite incurring the cost of ruining clothing or missing an appointment, because that child's life is inherently worth more than that cost. Similarly, Singer argues that we are morally obligated to give to charities that support the lives of potentially dying children and people because their lives are inherently worth more than that cost.

Percival: What does that have to do with a drowning child?

Peter: If you would save the child without hesitation at the expense of your new, expensive shoes, then you should at the minimum be motivated to donate something to other children that are dying around the world.

Percival: Oh...

Peter: Exactly, that gut feeling you're talking about is only about things immediately surrounding you, if that! It only applies to your subjective life. It is absolutely not some morality sensing faculty that you have and employ.

Percival: [Maintaining his naive innocence] But you still haven't told me what happens when you forget morality! Do you want the world to be some sick place where people are only indulging themselves and not paying attention to others?

Peter: Would you really not pay attention to others?

Percival: No, but that seems like what your suggesting!

Peter: All I've suggested is that morality doesn't exist. That it's a manufactured ideology. I didn't say anything about other people.

Percival: Well then I'm still waiting for your response. I still want to know what you do in a world without morality.

[Huge lightning and thunder strike]

Peter: [Getting extremely agitated by the weather] This storm really needs to pass!... I'm not sure yet. I need to think about it.

Percival: You definitely do. I'm not sure this nonsense of morality not existing gets us anywhere. Also, would you stop complaining about the weather if the lightning stopped?

Peter: I think we've made tremendous progress. I'm just not sure in what direction. [Mockingly] And yeah Percy go ahead and stop the lightning?

Percival: Well think about it; I'll be back in the morning!

[Percival exits, lightning subsides, the storm subsides]

Setting: Thursday morning. The same room. It's a beautiful, sunny day. Peter is writing furiously at a desk as Percival comes in.

Peter: [Mumbling phrases to himself as he writes] Will.... desire... power... morality... truth...

Percival: Good morning, are you feeling better today, Peter?

[No response, more mumbling]

Percival: [Scanning seeing an exhausted looking friend and an unchanged room] Have you been up all night? You look exhausted and it doesn't look like anything has moved since last night.

[No response, more mumbling. Percival comes closer to Peter to get a look at what he is writing.]

Percival: [Trying not to upset his volatile friend] Peter, what's this?

Peter: [Disregarding Percival's comments] Ah Percy good to see you! I've been thinking a lot about our conversation from last night.

Percival: Oh yes, there is no morality and we should all be serial killers.

Peter: NO! That's not it at all. The idea that there is no morality is just the idea that there is no common morality. There is no set of necessary or sufficient conditions that we could use to define an "objective good" or an "objective bad" in any meaningful way. Thus appealing to the terms is nonsense. Which means you get to decide how to live your life! You get to assign relative value to things.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Here I think Peter is getting at what Nietzsche called free spirits. Nietzsche describes the free spirit as being in control of what he or she values and as not having faith in any truths, but rather creating their own truths through their will to power (WTP 552, GOM 150). Free spirits are in control of what they value insofar as they choose the values they hold as opposed to allowing values to be chosen for or given to them. Some might argue that this value assigning is impossible, however, Nietzsche argues that "whatever has *value* in our world now does not have value in itself, according to its nature—nature is always value-less, but has been *given* value at some time, as a present—and it was *we* who gave and bestowed it" (GS 301). Furthermore, Nietzsche argues that we should look to artists for how to use this value assigning ability because they "make things beautiful, attractive, or desirable when they are not" (GS 299). Rather, artists take plain canvas and paint, and create the *honest illusion* of something beautiful from things that were not. Thus, artists create truth and value (See Hussain *Valuing for Nietzsche's Free Spirits*). How the free spirit assigns value and creates their truth is called their style.

Percival: Ahuh... What do you mean?

Peter: Do you own anything that has value beyond its monetary worth or functional use? Something that, perhaps, has sentimental value to you?

Percival: [Thinking for a moment] Well yes, as a child my parents didn't allow us to have pets so I often kept fruits and vegetables as companions. My favorite one was a bird gourd named Francis. One day Francis got too ripe, and I dropped him... [somberly] Francis was never the same... Bird Gourd guts everywhere....

Peter: [Not surprised, but slightly confused] I see, well perhaps I'll try my example too. I have a pocket watch that my father gave me for my 21st birthday. It was given to him by his father, who received it from his father. I didn't even know it existed before my father gave it to me, but I immediately valued it as unique and special. [A moment of apprehension] Kind of like your gourd.

Percival: [Smiles] Right! ... But, I'm still not seeing what you're saying.

Peter: Well, the watch, and I guess, your gourd, both have or had a unique sentimental value that we, respectively, gave to them. I could theoretically decide the watch was just like any other pocket watch and then not care as much about it. The fact that the watch has the story it does is only important because I think it's important. It would still have its monetary value and its functional value of telling time, but it would lack this special value that I've given it. A value no one else in the world could assign to it.

Percival: Right, like I assigned to Francis.

Peter: Yes, well, imagine if everything was like that. Imagine if there only existed things that you got to assign special, unique value to, and nothing had an intrinsic value.

Percival: [Confused] Okay, but what then? I don't see how that gets us anywhere. Plus, what do you make of the monetary and functional values you mentioned? Those still exist and we can't change those?

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This style is based on fulfillment of individual desire, which makes each free spirit unique. For example, one person might derive happiness from a given task, while another might derive happiness from a different task, and each individual should perform the task that maximally satisfies their own desires and is of their own style.

Peter: [Animated] It gets us everywhere! If we control how valuable something is to us, then we control how much it affects us. The monetary and functional values are irrelevant unless you value money and that specific functionality. But, anything can have those properties, well anything that tells time and is worth money, and you get to chose to value telling time and money. My pocket watch doesn't necessarily need to be the thing that provides those values to me. I can value the watch, but it only has the value that I give it. Valuing—

Percival: [Naively] Peter, what does this have to do with morality?

Peter: It does, hold on one second... I was on to something with this valuation rant and I just seem to have lost my train of thought...

[Peter trails off and leans back in his chair thinking. He soon begins shutting his eyes]

Percival: [Wanting to let his emotionally drained and sleep deprived companion rest, he whispers] Petey, do you want to get some rest?

Peter: [Snapping back at full volume] Percy, that doesn't matter! What matters is... Well no nothing matters. Unless I think it matters. So what matters is nothing inherently matters!

Percival: What are you saying?

Peter: [Examining what he's been writing and getting more animated] Okay. I think I have it... So Percy, what I'm trying to say is that without good and bad there seems to just be nothing. If something isn't good and it isn't bad, it's just kind of neutral and unimportant—that was the problem we reached last night, right? That no actions have consequence in a world without right and wrong, without good and bad. You thought everyone would be serial killers. And, we encountered the issue: what should someone do if they can't use good and bad to make decisions? If I can't strive to be a good person what should I be doing with my life?

Percival: Okay sure.

Peter: So what should you be doing if you can't strive to be a good person because there's no such thing as a *good* person?

Percival: I don't know

Peter: Well think about it!

Percival: [Defensively, but still confused] I am!

Peter: [Losing patience] Well we don't lose rationality when we lose good and bad. And, rationality is a way of making decisions. It doesn't necessarily rely on right and wrong, more just logical pathways.

Percival: [Still confused] Okay. So?

Peter: So, if we don't lose rationality, what do we get when we apply it to not having right and wrong?

Percival: [Wanting to please, but still confused] I don't know Peter?

Peter: Without good and bad can we still have best?

Percival: I don't think so? Good, better, best isn't that how it goes?

Peter: Well there is still progress without good and bad. I can strive towards a goal and make progress towards that goal, without invoking a goodness or badness of that progress or that goal?

Percival: Okay, I don't see where you're going, but I suppose that makes sense.

Peter: So best would just be the maximal fulfilling of a goal.

Percival: Okay?

Peter: So the rational individual strives to be the best individual they can be. That doesn't invoke goodness or badness.

Percival: I'm not sure about that, it sounds like it's good to be the best and it would be bad to be not the best. Isn't that why they would be striving to be the best?

Peter: No, no. The individual in question gets to decide what's best. They get to assign value to things.

Percival: But, don't we run into the Hitler problem with that logic? That the Holocaust becomes okay because Hitler thought it was?

Peter: Before we address that, let's just think about the nature of the theoretical person we're discussing. This individual would strive to be the best they can be

because that's the most rational thing to do. This individual would only be someone who satisfies their desires! Not because the satisfaction of desires is morally good, but because there is nothing to value besides the satisfaction of your own desires.

Percival: Well that's no good. People desire really bad things like Hitler! And don't say there is no such thing as bad, you know what I mean.

Peter: But are those people striving to be the best they can be?

Percival: Well if they get to chose what being the best they can be means?

Peter: Hmm, well that's true. But, there are certain qualities of the desires of this person that will make those desires distinct. They will have a certain type of desires. Someone who is fostering resentment towards other people isn't giving himself the ability to fulfill his own desires.<sup>6</sup> You should only have desires that you can fulfill.

Percival: Hmm I'm not sure if you've convinced me. I think that there is still this issue that without morality people aren't necessarily going to "get along" if they are just satisfying their own desires?

Peter: Well that's what a lot of people think. That in a state of nature people are terrible. Hobbes believed that. But Hobbes also thought people would come to create a social contract out of their own self-interest. That is, that people wouldn't kill each other because they know that if they all killed each other, then no one would be safe. Instead of living in constant fear of death, it's better to sacrifice some freedom in exchange for peace. That's a really rational thought. Trading off some limited aspect of freedom for some greater fulfillment of desire, some greater freedom—The opportunity to be the best you can be. That's a bit what this is like. You have a hierarchy of desires. Staying alive is the top (that's conditioned into us by evolution), and then things progressively go down. I can't tell you what your hierarchy looks like beyond that, but I can tell you that rationality should guide the desires that people are attempting to fulfill.<sup>7</sup>

Percival: But if rationality is universal, then shouldn't we have the same desires? I feel like your arguing for something that's impossible.

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<sup>6</sup> See the resentment I mention in footnote 3.

<sup>7</sup> Peter here is drawing from Hobbes' *Leviathan*. Hobbes argues that life in a state of nature would be "nasty, brutish, and short", and so the self-interested man created a social contract for the purpose of providing a better life for himself than in the state of nature.

Peter: Well rationality isn't universal. Well it is universal, that's why we have math, but there are some things that aren't at all like math. For example, I derive happiness from certain things, and you derive happiness from other distinct things, but we both derive happiness in abstract. So, it's rational for me to do the things that bring me happiness, and rational for you to do the things that bring you happiness, but the things that we are doing are most likely very different.

Percival: But you said they would have those certain qualities? That they would have a certain type of desires?

Peter: [Starting to sound progressively more insane, possibly from sleep deprivation] They would, but those qualities are very general. Even if I said something specific like all X's are yellow, the interpretation of the color yellow is an interpretation with an infinite number of possibilities. We're able to define the qualities of the desires because this is a very specific type of person, who is striving to be the best person they can be, which, admittedly they define, but still has to be of a specific type because of it. This person has reached almost a self-enlightenment—a practical paradise where everything is the best it can be because they made it that way. They've discovered that morality doesn't exist, and they flourish because of it!

Percival: I think you haven't slept enough Peter, because I'm not understanding anything you're saying right now.

Peter: [Disregarding Percival, focused on finding clarity to his thoughts] Now, if rationality is our guide and staying alive is the top priority, then you could say our ultimate desire is a sort of health, a long term health. Now, if health is our ultimate long term desire then we can draw out some conclusions—

Percival: Before you continue, I thought you said that nothing matters unless I give it value?

Peter: Right?

Percival: Well how can you tell me that I value health before I've decided to value it?

Peter: Well that's tricky. See I think that health is the name of the value that you will ultimately find if you think rationally about what the most important thing to you is. Your health is necessary for you to have any other enjoyments. Ultimately, your health is the largest factor contributing towards your ability to fulfill your desires. The interpretation of health is where our values will be distinct.

See for people that smoke cigarettes, they are supposedly contributing towards their death, taking away from their health—

Percival: Right. So they aren't living how you are suggesting!

Peter: Well no, not necessarily. There's a cost-value tradeoff for everything. If those cigarettes are helping someone concentrate on something that will ultimately provide them more health, or if those cigarettes (by some perhaps unfortunate circumstance) provide that person more happiness (i.e. contribution to their mental health) than the cigarettes take away from their physical health, then they are still making an appropriate decision.

Percival: So our target is mental and physical health? Isn't that all just chemical reaction, couldn't we fix that with some pill eventually?

Peter: Hmm. I mean I see what you're getting at, but that doesn't seem right. I'm going for things like happiness, which are beyond just chemical reactions right? My happiness is different than your happiness. You can't define my happiness. An equation couldn't model my happiness. It's like holistic health. Like health of me totally. At its instantaneous peak it's me being my best at that moment—

Percival: Ahhhh I know what you're getting at!

Peter: You do?

Percival: Yes! You want health of the soul!<sup>8</sup>

Peter: No I don't! The soul is too abstract and limited for what were talking about. Maybe health of the soul is part of what we're talking about, but we're aiming bigger and more practical!

Percival: So you want health of what then?

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<sup>8</sup> A rather insightful comment by Percival here actually draws from Plato. In *The Republic* Plato defines the health of the soul to be the level of "justice" within it. A healthy soul is that which is democratic, is guided by reason and keeps a balance between spirit and desire. Nietzsche touches on a similar idea mentioning a "peace of soul", however this peace of soul is realized as an "attained freedom of the will" (TI 489, WTP 79). Because freedom of the will necessarily relies on the execution of that will by a physical body, Nietzsche has to mean something greater than a health of the soul as his ultimate desire. That is why Peter will suggest an alternative desire to work with Nietzsche's framework.

Peter: Some sort of holistic, total health. The health that makes me the best person that I can be, with me defining best. A health that is mental and material, psychological and biological, physical and metaphysical.<sup>9</sup>

Percival: Okay, and how again do you go about getting that health?

Peter: Well okay so the tools at our disposal are rationality and the ability to assign value to things.

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<sup>9</sup> Ah, ultimate desires. I think Peter is running into the need for some ultimate desire in the framework that he is suggesting. Peter argues that one ought to ultimately desire total health, which is a complete picture and measure of the state of being of a person, because he believes it the most rational ultimate desire. That is, Peter recognizes that we should value fulfilling our desires, and, thus, we should value both the mechanism which allows us to fulfill our desires and whatever fulfilling our desires contributes towards—both of which Peter calls total health. Total health is psychological and biological, physical and mental, and material and immaterial. Factors that contribute towards a standard definition of health like physical well-being definitely play a role in total health, but also so do nontraditional parts like outlook on life, happiness, and, crucially, ability to fulfill your desires.

Peter argues for total health through the rationale that one ought to live life as best as they can and because total health at its peak is the highest and greatest fulfillment of potential of an individual it necessitates that that individual is living the best life. Thus, it is the best ultimate desire. Furthermore, total health is necessary to have in order to achieve all other goals, or at least achieve them in the easiest, most efficient manner possible. A minimum of total health is ultimately necessary for any goal to be completed because your body literally cannot function without a baseline of some biological and psychological health. If you are too ill in either respect you will not be able to fulfill your desires and not be able to live your life with appropriate style.

Nietzsche argues for a type of total health in his philosophy. He argues that the hardest test of the independence of the free spirit is its ability to “conserve” itself, which I argue is the maintenance and growth of its total health or rather its constant progression to be totally healthier (BGE II, 41). Thus, total health doesn’t allow for a stagnant individual like Nietzsche’s last men, who are content with almost no progress (Z Zarathustra’s Prologue, 5). Total health necessitates constant growth and improvement because it naturally declines with stagnation. That is, if an individual is not trying to improve their total health in some way then they are not being totally healthful. Moreover, Nietzsche argues that the free spirit is “Something that in itself strives after greater strength, and that wants to “preserve” itself only indirectly (it wants to *surpass* itself—)” (WTP 55-56). This self-surpassal is the product of and motivation for the constant improvement of total health. It is the ability to fulfill your desires greater than you could fulfill them before. A person who is not striving for this self-surpassal cannot be totally healthy because even a person who has reached an instantaneous maximum of their total health has a desire to improve, and that desire isn’t being met. Furthermore, Plato’s health of the soul allows for stagnation like the last men, whereas the individual striving for total health cannot be stagnant because they have this continuous desire for self-surpassal.

Percival: Right!

Peter: [still thinking] And we're after this total health.

Percival: That's what you've told me.

Peter: And this person is hyper rational. They constantly think about and analyze their surroundings and situation. They take in every data point they can find and analyze how they can make the best decision possible. If they've decided to value something, like a vase for example, then they would do everything in their power to prevent that vase from breaking.

Percival: But wouldn't that just mean they should put the vase in a safe where it could never get damaged?

Peter: Well they still want to fulfill their desires because that contributes to their total health. So if they desire to see and use the vase then the vase needs to be out where they can see and use it.

Percival: So this person just does what he or she can to make sure the vase doesn't break? That doesn't seem particularly powerful?

Peter: It's powerful because the vase never breaks.

Percival: What do you mean? Of course the vase breaks. If you put it on the table, and someone knocks it over, then it will break?

Peter: It won't get knocked over, the vase never breaks.

Percival: [Thinking Peter is delusional] I really think you should sleep Peter.

Peter: No, no you'll come to understand, but, okay, in the case that the vase does break (which it won't), what do you think happens? Do you think that the person who valued the vase will be upset?

Percival: Well yes?

Peter: Wrong! They assign value so when it breaks they stop valuing it!

Percival: I think I know where you're going Peter. You want to prevent pain by not wanting anything!

Peter: NO! That's stoicism. I've read stoics. Epictetus is powerful, but he's limited. This person isn't limited. This person is unlimited. That's why the vase never breaks.<sup>10</sup>

Percival: I really don't get what you mean here. How does the vase not break?

Peter: Because you've done everything to prevent it from breaking!

Percival: But accidents happen?

Peter: No learning happens. You continually strive to be the best you can be. When you become the best, then the vase doesn't break. Until then you strive to be the best!

Percival: But how? No one is that strong. It's not like he's a superhero.

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<sup>10</sup> The vase never breaks. That's a very interesting interpretation of Nietzsche by Peter. Nietzsche often attacks the ascetic or stoic ideal, but I argue that he does so only because he recognizes that his philosophy has a possible collision with that ideal. The stoic philosophy for life is an attempt to maximize happiness by only deriving happiness from things that are in personal control; they sacrifice all of their own wants and desires outside of their personal control as a means of avoiding dissatisfaction. This ideology seems to be close to Nietzsche's, however, according to Nietzsche the ascetic ideal greatly minimizes what is "in our control" and it is fundamentally crippled by that underestimation. For example, the first passage of Epictetus's *Enchiridion* states that "Things in our control are opinion, pursuit, desire, aversion, and, in a word, whatever are our own actions. Things not in our control are body, property, reputation, command, and, in one word, whatever are not our own actions" (Epictetus 1). Epictetus's distinction seems rational, however, Nietzsche would argue that instead of minimizing desires to avoid dissatisfaction it is more rational to maximize personal capability to maximize satisfaction. Nietzsche argues that "The three great slogans of the ascetic ideal are familiar: poverty, humility, chastity... There is thus nothing of virtue in this" and rather you should look to maximize personal attributes (GOM III, 8). Furthermore, Nietzsche argues that the stoics are "far from being free spirits because they still have faith in the truth" (GOM III, 24). That is, the stoic doesn't assign value to things, but rather try to maximize satisfaction by only enjoying things of guaranteed, immediate value.

Nietzsche's philosophy often sounds like stoicism because it is a form of stoicism. However, it's an antithetical flavor compared to traditional stoicism. Nietzsche's philosophy to an extent agrees with the stoic belief that you should only derive happiness from what is in your control because Nietzsche argues that you should only value things that you've assigned value to. However, unlike stoicism, where the practical upshot of that philosophy is to focus on what is in your control and limit your derivations of happiness to only those sources, Nietzsche's belief is that by controlling what you value, everything is in your control. According to Nietzsche there is no situation that is not in your control—this is the divide between the Stoics and Nietzsche.

[Pause]

Peter: [Smiles] He is a superhero. A superhero that has created himself. No nuclear waste, no science experiment gone wrong, no being from another planet. He's a superhero who has used his will and his rationality to realize his full power and potential. They have willed themselves to this position of power, and continue using this will, this will to power, to overcome all of their obstacles.<sup>11</sup>

Percival: [Coyly looking at Peter] Peter, do you really believe what you're saying right now? Are you that sleep deprived that you're suggesting that we can all be superheroes?

Peter: [Sleep deprived and seeking clarity] I guess I'm not sure. I think we get something better if we believe we can be superheroes than if we believe it's impossible.

Percival: What do you mean? I mean, aren't there people who do believe they are superheroes, but they are also mentally ill?

Peter: No it's not like that. I mean. Well. I'm not sure.... All night the idea that we could all be these "superheroes" just seemed better and better. I guess I thought if people weren't held to these standards of good and bad, and just did what they wanted to do then they would do something really good!

Percival: Why did you think that?

Peter: Well I guess I think society places a lot of limits on people. Unfair limits. Wrong limits. Limits that should be overcome.

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<sup>11</sup> The will to power—what an incredible tool. Nietzsche argues that the free spirit asserts his or her style over life via his or her will to power. This will to power is a "spontaneous, aggressive, expansive, form-giving" force that everyone innately has access to (GOM II, 12). For Nietzsche the will to power is everything. Nietzsche argues that there is no truth in the world, just strong and weak wills trying to assert their power (BGE I, 21).

Nietzsche, however, is vague about how this will to power functions in practice. He argues that the will to power is the force of an individual, but force seems to be an abstract concept, and its implementation is difficult to explain (WTP 636). Perhaps force could be the ability to fulfill your desires, which I think Peter would like because it fits with total health nicely. Nietzsche does mention strong and weak wills, and therefore we know that this will to power is a skill that can be practiced and made better, but it is unclear what the exact techniques involved in this skill are. Peter has brought up rationality, but hopefully he continues to define this practical mechanism for the will to power.

Percival: And being superheroes is how we overcome them?

Peter: I guess it's not the concrete belief that you will be a superhero, but rather the steadfast believe that you could be if you wanted to.

Percival: What about disappointment? What about when someone shoots for the stars and misses? That doesn't seem to be a powerful thought.

Peter: No, no it's not like that either!

Percival: What's it like then?

Peter: It's like... It's like if you believe you can do anything and you go about doing things, you'll do them better than if you believed you couldn't do anything.

Percival: But, what if you believe you can just do the things you can do? Isn't that better?

Peter: No, because then you're stuck! Then you're never doing anything greater than what you did before! And that's where we see the really amazing parts of humanity—when people do things that they couldn't or at least thought they couldn't do before. Watching Olympic athletes break world records is amazing! Not because it's really entertaining to yell “run faster” at someone sprinting for 10 seconds, but because it's incredible to see someone sprint the same distance quicker than you or anyone has ever done it before. It's amazing to see people breaking limits that they thought existed.

Percival: [Recognizing the raw hope and faith in humanity that Peter is expressing] Okay, so you were saying that you have someone who doesn't believe in morality, and that person has rationality and this ability to assign value to things.

Peter: Yes!

Percival: And they have this ultimate desire for health, which is not strictly a biological health, but a holistic human health, a total health. Now I think the superhero part is a bit far fetched, but even someone who believes they could be something like a superhero, maybe a rock star, and never makes it— How do they reconcile that?

Peter: [Smiling that his friend has decided to embrace what he's saying] Well the simple answer is that they shouldn't value being a rock star, but I guess I get what you're saying. How do we deal with aspects of life that are just out of our control? How do we believe we can do anything, if there are just some brutally

clear examples that prove we can't... That's a good question Percival. I hadn't really thought about that.

[Pause. Percival looks over Peter's notes from the night and Peter contemplates the issue that he's encountered]

Peter: Percy, do you still believe in astrology?

Percival: [Smiling] Of course! My horoscopes tell me how I'm doing all the time.

Peter: Right, but Percy you know there is nothing that factually supports horoscopes? In fact, there's definitely evidence that suggests horoscopes are utter nonsense.

Percival: I suppose, but I quite enjoy them so I indulge myself and believe in them.

Peter: And, I guess I would consider you a rational individual outside of this obviously nonsensical belief.

Percival: [Smiling] Me too!

Peter: But how do you? I mean there is undoubtedly evidence that shows your belief is entirely irrational, yet you, being a supposedly rational individual, still maintain your irrational belief in astrology?

Percival: Well... I guess I just sort of chose to believe the horoscopes, and I sort of chose not to always remember the evidence that suggests that they're wrong. Plus, I think a scientist would find that I'm undoubtedly a Sagittarius.

Peter: [Smiling as he says the words] You sort of chose not to always remember the evidence? Is that rational whatsoever?<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> This reminds me of a paper by Adam Elga called *On Overrating Oneself... and Knowing it*. In the paper, Elga presents the idea that people can deceive themselves despite being presented with evidence against their beliefs. He elucidates this philosophy through commentary on an anecdote about himself and his friend, Daria, who believes in astrology. Elga wonders how it is possible that Daria still maintains her belief in the pseudo-science despite presenting her with evidence that astrology is bunk, Daria agreeing that the evidence Elga presents is valid, and Daria acknowledging that she lacks any counter evidence. He argues that Daria is actively violating the norm of rationality that "one ought not have beliefs that go against what one reasonably thinks one's

Percival: Well I'd like to think so! The horoscopes make me happy, and I don't really see a negative consequence by believing in them, so I think it might be rational to maintain irrational beliefs if they are for your ultimate benefit!

Peter: [Smiling. Slightly stunned] That's brilliant. That's exactly it! If not always remembering some facts actually benefits you then it's entirely rational to not consider them. You can still be rational and not pay attention to facts because you are just being non-reflective towards them. That is, you recognize that these facts exist, but that you aren't reflecting on their existence. That's how you do it Percival! That's how you believe you can do anything, even when there are obvious examples to the contrary.

Percival: [Excited, but skeptical] But, Peter, I'm worried that won't always be the case. I mean in my circumstances the horoscopes don't really affect my life. They are just sort of a fun thing for me to do. But, I worry that in your case, someone, if they really bought in to what you were saying, could think "I can get

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evidence supports", yet he still believes Daria to be a rational person (Elga 116). Furthermore, he recognizes his own self-deception in the face of a psychological study that suggests that people overrate their own skill levels in accomplishing different tasks. That is, despite evidence from a study that shows that people overrate themselves through a positive illusion of their own abilities, Elga realizes that he doesn't change his beliefs about how he rates himself. Elga reconciles his and Daria's seemingly irrational behavior by claiming that while he and Daria are deceiving themselves they were in a non-reflective state. That is, a state where they do not fully reflect on all evidence presented to them. This non-reflective state is a state where you can still function rationally in all aspects except in regard to the specific evidence that would make your behavior irrational. It's a form of self-deception, or self-induced ignorance.

Nietzsche suggests the need for this type of non-reflective behavior by arguing that man can only have truth through self-deception (OTLEMS 1). Furthermore, Nietzsche argues that some sort of self-deception is necessary in order to be a free spirit: "There are a few things we now know too well, we knowing ones: oh how we now learn to forget well, and to be good at not knowing, as artists" (GS Preface for the Second edition, 4). As stated earlier, Nietzsche argues that artists are the perfect prototype to emulate for assigning value to things in life because they create *honest illusions* in their art. These *honest illusions* necessarily employ the use of a non-reflective state because in order to truly enjoy a piece of art you need to be non-reflective to some of the practical facts of what you are seeing. That is, while beholding and enjoying a painting you remain non-reflective towards the facts about the painting like that it is not real or that it is just paint on canvas (Hussain *Valuing for Nietzsche's Free Spirits* 168-172).

Furthermore, this non-reflective state gets us closer to a practical technique for using the will to power. Nietzsche argues that only through "unconsciousness" and "forgetfulness" can man arrive at truth, and thus this non-reflective state is a practical mechanism for implementing the will to power and creating truth (OTLEMS 1).

hit by a car and not get hurt", and then jump in the middle of traffic, and, well, get hurt.

Peter: [Not worried in the slightest] No Percy because again, we're talking about rational actors here. They will recognize that some facts will always be helpful to be reflective of, like the facts of physics that tell you if you get hit by a car, you will, well as you said, get hurt. We use this mindset to reach our ultimate goal of being the totally healthiest person we can be.<sup>13</sup>

[Pause. Peter sits, beaming and feeling content. Percival walks around the room, pondering if his friend is a genius or lunatic]

Percival: Peter?

Peter: [Beaming in satisfaction and sleep deprivation] Percival?

Percival: I think you just described God?

Peter: What?

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<sup>13</sup> Peter's play off rationality is interesting. He is suggesting that one ought to desire to live their life as best as they can live it. Which means that a person ought to be non-reflective when it is to their benefit. Nietzsche argues a similar idea:

But man has an invincible inclination to allow himself to be deceived, and is, as it were, enchanted with happiness when the rhapsodist tells him epic fables as if they were true, or when the actor in the theater acts more royally than any real king. So long as it is able to deceive without injuring, that master of deception, the intellect, is free; it is released from its former slaver and celebrates its Saturnalia. (OTLEMS 2)

Thus, according to Nietzsche the free spirit should be non-reflective insofar as this non-reflectivity is done for a beneficial purpose, or avoids causing injury. The person that enjoys the vase should be fully reflective of the ways the vase could break, and puts their best effort into preventing those situations. However, this person should then be non-reflective about the potential of the vase breaking because at that point any worry is irrational—there is nothing they can further do to prevent the vase from breaking, so it is best to not worry about it and be non-reflective towards the possibility that it could break.

There still seems to be a difficulty in the theoretically possible case where the vase breaks. In this case I think Peter would suggest that you act non-reflectively towards your enjoyment of the previously whole vase. Furthermore, it seems that this type of non-reflectivity is necessary for Nietzsche's philosophy because it allows you to maintain rationality as an *unlimited* individual despite the obvious counter-examples (i.e. the instance when the vase breaks despite Peter's notion that he could prevent it from ever breaking).

Percival: Well... At least some sort of omniscient being. How could we ever have every data point? I think what you're thinking is beautiful, and it's really hopeful, but it's just not realistic. I mean you even called it a superhero. What are people striving for here? For the impossible? You're just telling people that they should just try to be superheroes and then eventually they will be? Doesn't that sound ridiculous? Does this do anything practical for you?

Peter: [Processing what his friend has just said] I think we can make sense of this. At least most of it. [Thinks for a moment] let's start with your first point... About being omniscient... Now, obviously I'm not suggesting complete omniscience. I'm not even sure God is completely omniscient, [Under his breath] especially when you consider what infinity really is... But okay back to your point... Let's go back to our vase example— now in the example the person derived happiness from seeing and displaying the vase, so the rational thing for them to do is to see and display the vase.

Percival: Right that makes sense.

Peter: We also said that because they derive happiness from the vase that they should take the necessary steps to prevent the vase from breaking. Maybe putting some sort of stickum on the bottom of it to hold it to the table. Now, we can add to our example the non-reflectivity that we discovered. It would make sense for this person to then be non-reflective towards the potential of the vase breaking because they already put their best effort into preventing it from breaking. Even if the vase did break, it would be irrational to expect anything else because they put their best effort into it. They simply could not have stopped the vase from breaking so it would be irrational to expect anything else.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Here Peter is arguing that it is irrational to expect an outcome greater than your capability of providing for that outcome. That is if you truly could not have prevented the vase from breaking then you shouldn't be disappointed in its breaking. Nietzsche would argue that you should believe that you can prevent the vase from ever breaking, but in the situation that it does break you should be content with that outcome (which, given humanity's emotional inclinations seems difficult, but could be made possible by the use of a non-reflective state).

Nietzsche cannot argue that disappointment will be entirely avoided in his philosophy; however, he can argue that his life philosophy offers the highest level of total health as compared to either stoicism or a traditional moral calculus. Nietzsche's philosophy is a sort of personal version of Pascal's wager: through faithful use of your will to power you will find greater total health, than if you did not use and have faith in this will to power. Moreover, you should be faithful to your ability to do anything through your will to power because it will provide you a better ultimate result in practice than if you attempted any other life philosophy. For Nietzsche, you should not rely on an outcome

Percival: Alright...but earlier you said the vase never breaks.

Peter: Right! Because you should be supremely rational and observe all the possible ways the vase could break and prevent the vase from breaking.

Percival: But, you just said even if the vase does break, they shouldn't expect anything else.

Peter: Well I suppose this is where we distinguish between the superhero and the man trying to be the superhero, if that makes sense? Man is striving to be the infallible superhero.

Percival: So the superhero prevents the vase from ever breaking, but the man just lets it break because he's put his best effort into it?

Peter: The man doesn't let it break. The man puts his best effort into preventing the vase from breaking, and then doesn't reflect on the possibility of the vase breaking because that's how he maximizes his total health, by avoiding the worry of the vase breaking. Again the man is a rational actor. He knows that the vase doesn't have a high likelihood of breaking while nobody is home, the windows are shut, and the house is locked, but it does have a high likelihood of breaking when he's throwing a dinner party. So, while it has a high likelihood of breaking he puts his best effort into preventing it from breaking and doesn't expect anything besides the result of his best effort.

Percival: But, okay, I guess I see what you're saying, but what about for more complicated matters? I suppose you could ensure that a vase never breaks, which seems like a lot of effort for a vase and doesn't quite sound worth it, but sure, I'll grant you that it never breaks. But, what about interactions in highly complex scenarios. What about interactions with other human beings?

[Pause. Peter contemplates]

Peter: I mean, when I realized that you can assign value to things in a unique way, I just figured other people weren't going to be a factor. But, I suppose that isn't practical.

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greater than your personal capability, but you should always strive to maximize your capability in order to maximize your outcome. Or rather, you ought to perform like you believe you have unlimited capability, but only expect what the product of your best effort is (which should necessarily be the outcome of your performance).

Percival: Exactly! So what does that do for us, when we are forced to interact with people every day! And, please don't suggest that we all go to Walden and live in isolation.

Peter: No Percy, you know I won't. I'm here to defend this theory.

Percival: So what do you make of it?

[Pause. Peter contemplates. Percival has the same look of contemplation]

Peter: Empathy.

Percival: Sorry?

Peter: Empathy is how you solve the other people problem.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Empathy, a faculty that all human beings have access to, is what allows us to feel the emotional state of another human being. The rational human being is one that makes a decision with respect to any evidence that they have, the best decisions are ones most supported by data and evidence, and thus, the empathetic faculty that we have should always be used because it gives us the most data and evidence with which to make decisions regarding other people. Nietzsche argues that empathy is necessarily something everyone is capable of, and should be encouraged to do:

Every living thing reaches out as far from itself with its force as it can, and overwhelms what is weaker: thus it takes pleasure in itself. The increasing "humanizing" of this tendency consists in this, that there is an ever subtler sense of how hard it is really to incorporate another: while a crude injury done him certainly demonstrates our power over him, it at the same time estranges his will from us even more- and us makes him less easy to subjugate (WTP 769).

Although Nietzsche's use of "subjugate" connotes a malicious intent, if you take into account that subjugation of your will is actually closer to *good* in Nietzsche's revised version of the idea, then you see the necessary use and power of an empathetic faculty in employing the will to power in practice. Furthermore, if your ability to fulfill your desire is part of total health, and as Nietzsche suggests empathy allows for better desire fulfillment (or subjugation), then empathy provides for greater total health. It is another aspect of the will to power in practice.

Some might argue that there is no need to interact with other people and this empathy point is flawed. However, Nietzsche recognizes that man is necessarily a social creature and desires to peacefully coexist with others (OTLEMS 1). Moreover, man is necessarily social and every social interaction involving another individual has an outcome; the empathetic faculty allows you to reach that outcome in the best way possible. The outcome reached through empathetic understanding is necessarily the one that is best for both people because it allows for direct psychological understanding of everyone involved.

Percival: And by empathy you mean feeling bad for other people, but not feeling sympathetic?

Peter: By empathy I mean the deep understanding of other people. Not treating people how you want to be treated, but treating people how they want to be treated. I think our faculty for empathy is one of the largest data inputs that we can have.

Percival: But, what are you saying? That you just know how other people feel? That seems impossible.

Peter: It's not just knowing how other people feel. It's, well, first, it's a product of being a person yourself and knowing how you feel when certain things happen to you. Then, it's placing yourself in someone else's shoes, but as they are, you have to imagine you have the values that the other person has and really think deeply about how things might affect them.

Percival: I guess I've never really thought about that. I always try to love and respect people, but I usually forget that everyone is so unique.

Peter: Exactly, and that uniqueness is beautiful, but it's also something to be mindful of. [Pauses, and then gets an even more frenzied look in his eyes] And this solves the Hitler problem! Empathy will get us the type of desire that I was talking about earlier!

Percival: How so?

Peter: [Rapidly] If you're fully empathetic with everyone around you. If you are actively striving to take in every data point offered to you by other people, then you will know how they feel in a given situation because you will also feel it—full empathy. And, that's why people won't go around being terrible like you were worried about, because they'll be empathetic! They'll actively experience any pain they cause because they'll be so mindful of the person that's in pain.

Percival: But wouldn't you just non-reflect on the pain you're causing because it hurts you?

Peter: No of course not! Because you get so much data from being empathetic that it would be irrational to turn that off.

Percival: But you think empathy can be this powerful? That you can get understanding of people this deep? To the point where you can use this faculty to change how you interact with people?

Peter: Absolutely.

Percival: Absolutely?

Peter: Absolutely!

Percival: I mean forgive my skepticism, but even if I just try to do this with you right now, I'm not sure what I get? You lost this girl you just met, and then you've been on this tirade ever since. You didn't even sleep last night! My empathy is telling me that you're in shock from your loss and you're suggesting this radical change in life almost as a coping mechanism? Is that the case?

Peter: [A little shaken at the mention of Lucy, but steadfast in his belief nonetheless] Well Percival, I suppose that isn't entirely inaccurate, but I will say this: I really believe in what I'm saying now. It might have been the shock of losing [Catches himself before showing real emotional pain] Lucy that spurred me to these thoughts. I don't think I would've questioned things this fundamentally without that, but I feel really passionate about what we've come to. And, I really think it's a beneficial way to look at things. I mean if you could be a superhero and do anything, wouldn't life be amazing? Wouldn't it be great if we didn't have to experience loss? [Quickly, quietly trailing off] If we could bring people back from the dead? If we could fly?

Percival: Peter... I think you really need to sleep. I've tried to listen to everything that you're saying and it sounds great and optimistic, but I'm just worried it's not realistic. And, maybe it might be good for you to be unrealistic, while you're suffering this loss, but long-term this isn't good for you!

Peter: How do you know?

Percival: How do I know what?

Peter: [Angry] How do you know what is or isn't good for me? Is that empathy? Or is that you asserting your own values onto me?

Percival: [Returning the anger] Peter it's me thinking you lost someone you were taken with, you haven't slept, and you've come up with this insane ideology overnight! Doesn't that concern you? Shouldn't you wait to make changes after a large emotional incident?

[Pause. Percival is standing, breathing heavily in front of a seated Peter]

Peter: [Conspicuously smiling, Peter has totally changed his demeanor] Percy, I understand what you're saying. I'm certainly in some sort of shock losing Lucy, but, I don't know, I still think I would've come to these ideas without that—it was just kind of a catalyst. I guess it took me actually believing there wasn't good in the world to question its existence. [Chuckles to himself]. I mean it's kind of funny isn't it? [Chuckles more, getting more crazed in his speech]. It's like it's a self-sustaining belief. You believe in good there is good [Laughs]. You don't believe in good there is bad. There is bad. Just bad. But! [Laughs more] If you don't believe in bad, and you already didn't believe in good, then we get something interesting. [Laughs]. Then we get life. [Laughs more aggressively]. THEN WE GET LIFE Percival! [Laughs hysterically]

[Percival stands in front of the hysterically laughing Peter unsure of what's going on with his friend. He thinks his friend might be completely delusional and totally sleep deprived. He contemplates what to do.]

Percival: Peter are you okay?

[Peter stops laughing, and looks up at his friend apologetically]

Peter: I'm sorry about that. I just realized something that I hadn't thought about in a while and it was a funny thing to think about.

Percival: [Worried] Peter, I think you really need to get some sleep. You're practically bi-polar right now. I've never seen you in such a manic-depressive state.

Peter: No, No Percy, I promise I'm fine. I was just thinking about how crazy the world is, how there is contradiction everywhere, how life just isn't rational sometimes. And, it's okay that life's irrational, but everyone needs to know that. Life's a joke and that doesn't mean it's unimportant, but it means that life is here for our entertainment and pleasure. It's something that we can laugh at, that we should laugh at. Human's wouldn't have lasted so long if we were just here to be serious about everything. We shouldn't always take life so seriously. And people do take it so seriously and it's something that you can either laugh at or it's something that could make you go insane.

Percival: [Still worried and still skeptical] Alright Peter, no one's taking anything too seriously here. Now do you want to get some rest?

Peter: [Completely normal] No, Percy, really I'm fine. Sorry, as you've said I haven't slept in a while and I think that got to me. But, I'm really fine.

Percival: [Utterly confused] Are you sure? Because I haven't understood almost anything that you've said this morning.

Peter: [Returning to his analytic demeanor] Well Percy what do you understand?

Percival: [Now intrigued more by his friend's actual state of being and less by what his friend is arguing for. So in an attempt to placate his friend he answers] Well, I suppose I understood that morality is just something man created, and it doesn't actually exist in an objective realm. I think that makes sense. And, then we were wondering what happens then, and that's when you got this superhero idea. Where if we all think we are superheroes then we can all be superheroes—

Peter: [Listening attentively, but interrupting at this error] No! Percy, that's the mentality, but remember we boiled it down to just someone who is rational and observes all the facts and acts to use that rationality and those facts to their advantage, and not the other way around.

Percival: Okay, right and they have the ability to value things too.

Peter: Right!

Percival: So we have this person who doesn't have morality, but has rationality and the ability to value things. And then you said that they should desire health, because that's rational. And it's not discretely biological health, but some kind of total health. And part of how you remain rational through this whole process is by having a non-reflective state.

Peter: Exactly, the same thing you have towards astrology.

Percival: [Slightly perturbed at the comment, but is lightening up after seeing Peter behave more normally] Yes, the same attitude I have towards astrology. And, also this person is as empathetic as possible, and that empathy not only helps them fulfill their desires better because they can interact with people in a better way, but it also prevents them from being a terrible person because they won't cause pain to other people or they will at least be forcibly aware of the pain that they're causing.

Peter: It sounds like you've understood it all!

Percival: Well Peter this is where I lose you, I guess I see what you're saying, and it kind of has some sense to it, but I don't see how this could possibly happen in practice. It just seems that you are kind of suggesting something impossible for any person.

Peter: What's impossible about it? At its core is this simple belief: I have a subjective reality, and I have control over how I experience it. From there, you apply the rational belief that you should do what's best for you, and you realize that you should use your control over how you subjectively experience reality to make your experience of it the best it can be.

Percival: Right, but Pete I think where we differ is what we believe is actually "in our control".

Peter: [Stands] You're really not getting it? Why do you have any limit on what you believe is in your control?

Percival: Because I've had desires that went unsatisfied? Because I've felt pain before? Because I've lived life? I mean Peter, I'm generally an optimist, but I've had bad things happen to me, and it would be a horrible thing for you to say that it was all in my control and blame me for any of these things?<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Nietzsche argues that man is a summation of his experiences, that he is the collection and result of everything that he has done (Nehamas 398). If this is true, then there is an easy response to the counter argument that Percival is presenting: people have not yet had the experiences necessary to make their will to power fully (or even operationally) functional. Peter has thus experienced a possible chain of events that would result in a functionally strong, or even, just awoken will to power. That is, he has engaged in deep, critical thought about the natural world, progressed from believing in morality, to not believing in morality, created his own response to this lack of morality, and ultimately applied that response to his life. I think a similar arc must be followed when attempting to apply Nietzsche in practice. To immediately apply his anti-morality arguments into your own life, without the necessary experience of critically analyzing an objective morality, would be fruitless because you would simply take away the foundation of a moral framework that you don't understand. Furthermore, if you imagine the will to power as a skill or faculty that we all have access to, but have yet to consciously use, it is easy to see why some people haven't used it and are thus incapable of applying it. This is comparable to a body builder, who at the peak of her training can lift 315 pounds on bench press, but when she first started lifting weights could barely lift 45 pounds. It would be wrong to assume that the body builder could immediately lift 315 pounds, but it would also be wrong to assume that lifting 315 pounds is impossible for the body builder. Thus, this notion of the unlimited capabilities of the will to power, despite immediate counters that it must be necessarily limited due to common experiences of dissatisfaction, is completely fair and reasonable.

Peter: But that was before you had the power of making everything in your control! Look, I told you, this isn't black and white. I'm not promising you an immediate, miracle cure, just the potential of one! It's like a skill that you're practicing. I'm not placing blame on anyone, and I'm not saying that your past dissatisfactions are something that you could've prevented, but I'm suggesting that this ideology will give you a better life than you previously had.

Percival: Are you sure? You've made me think you were having a stroke at least twice today. Are you really living a better life? Plus, how practiced are you? How can you say these things after being a "superhero" for not even 24 hours now?

Peter: Confidence through reason.

Percival: What?

Peter: I'm confident in what I'm saying because it's reasonable. It all makes sense! This ideology is the process of layering multiple levels of rationality, and coming up with something that is physically and metaphysically rational, that is rational in multiple dimensions! I've thought so deeply about this and it's profound Percy, profound!<sup>17</sup>

Percival: But, you could also be utterly insane?

Peter: Look, I've tried to spell it out from this armchair, but I think I just need to show you.

Percival: Show me?

Peter: [Walking towards the door] Outside the cave Percy, I need to show you outside the cave!

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<sup>17</sup> I think Peter has come to the end of his explanation of this new philosophy. He has tried to argue that this philosophy is rational on multiple levels. That in every case and dimension he is getting the maximum benefit of his experience and contributing maximally to total health. Peter has pulled from Nietzsche to argue that there is no objective morality, and then created a new, revised ethics for life. An ethics centered around an ultimate desire for total health, which employs the use of the will to power to achieve this aim. The will to power is the judicious use of non-reflectivity, rationality, value assigning, and empathy as a means of achieving maximal total health. Peter has admitted that in practice man is obviously not superman, and thus he has limits. However, by analyzing which of those limits provides benefit and which of them does not, you can, respectively, reflect and non-reflect on those limits to reach a better end than you would've had you been entirely reflective of all limits.

Percival: [Following Peter] Is that a reference?

Peter: [Walking out the front door] A reference to your future!

[Peter & Percival Exit]

Setting: Outside the house. It's a beautiful day free of a single cloud.

Peter: [Walking briskly] What a lovely day!

Percival: [Almost struggling to keep up] Peter what are we doing?

Peter: Well, currently we are walking.

Percival: No, I can see that, but where are we going?

Peter: On a walk!

Percival: Why are you being so cryptic? I thought you were trying to clarify something for me?

Peter: Well I'm trying to show you something that I hope will clarify things for you.

Percival: Okay, and what are you trying to show me?

[They make a quick turn at a fork in the road]

Peter: I'm afraid if I tell you then you won't follow me.

Percival: [Bothered by the confusion, but progressively more intrigued] follow you where?

Peter: You'll see!

Percival: [Stops] Peter I won't keep following you unless you tell me where were going.

Peter: [Continuing] I think you will!

Percival: [Still standing, yelling at a now distant Peter] I won't Peter! I'm still worried you're delusional!

Peter: [Laughs] Maybe I am!

[Peter continues over a hill and disappears. Percival is still unmoved. He's pondering what his friend is doing and if he's obligated to follow him.]

Percival: [To himself] What on earth is my friend doing? Is he delusional? Am I obligated to keep an eye on him?

[Percival reflects on how insane his friend has been in the last 24 hours and considers going after him]

Percival: [To himself] Peter has been absolutely insane recently, I should probably go after him before he hurts himself... or others.

[Percival remains still, troubled by the uncertainty of everything]

Percival: [To himself] This is awfully troubling...

[A loud female scream is heard in the distance, sending Percival into a panic]

Percival: [Starting to run] Oh dear lord what has he done!

[As Percival follows Peter's path he hopes Peter hasn't done anything to hurt anyone, he begins to worry that Peter is his responsibility. Another scream is heard; Percival quickens his pace]

Percival: [To himself] is that Peter in the distance?

[Percival continues to run to his friend]

Percival: Who is he talking to? Is that a girl?

[Percival see's Peter under an apple tree talking with a girl. Both appear to be fine.]

Percival: [Yelling] Peter! Peter! What are you doing?

[Percival continues to run until he reaches Peter and the girl under the apple tree]

Percival: [Catching his breath] Peter! Thank God you're alright. If you were just going to go to this tree, why didn't you tell me that?

Peter: Well, I wasn't going to this tree, I was going to meet her.

Girl: Hi, I'm Lucy.

[Percival looks up and sees the tall, blond girl standing next to Peter for the first time]

Percival: [Quite stunned] Hi... I'm Percival... Are you... Are you the Lucy that Peter met earlier this week?

Peter: Yes, that's her!<sup>18</sup>

Percival: [Still stunned almost afraid to address the girl] Are you sure this is her? There is strong evidence that suggests that it couldn't possibly be her.

Peter: [Smiling] I know, but I've decided to be non-reflective towards that evidence.

Lucy: [Confused] What are you guys talking about?

Peter: Oh don't worry about him, he's exhausted from trying to keep up with me. Anyways, I'm glad you came!

Lucy: Yes, after we talked on Tuesday I knew I had to come prove that I was more trustworthy than that snake. Plus, I love fresh apples, and this tree has the most delicious apples!

[Percival is still standing there stunned. He doesn't know what to make of what's going on in front of him. Peter and Lucy continue having their conversation]

Peter: [Enthusiastically, with clear flirtation] They are the most delicious apples! Did you know apples, well apple trees, are in the rose family?

Lucy: [Laughing, also clearly flirtatious] What? No way! Roses don't have any fruit? What are you going to—

Percival: [Still perplexed] Wait, just a second for that thought Lucy, could I borrow Peter from you?

Lucy: [Smiling] Sure! I actually should be going, but since this was short, let's meet tomorrow Peter?

Peter: [Also smiling] Yes definitely, see you then!

[Lucy exits]

Percival: [Emphatically] What the fuck?

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<sup>18</sup> This cannot be the girl that Peter met earlier in the week. He's deluded from lack of sleep and is hallucinating that the girl is the same.

Peter: [Still smiling] What the fuck what?

Percival: That girl is dead!<sup>19</sup>

Peter: Clearly she's not!

Percival: What do you mean you guess she's not? What the fuck is going on?

Peter: Nothing is going on? When we met on Tuesday I told her I'd meet at this time today!

Percival: [Flabbergasted] But, you're delusional right? That wasn't actually Lucy?

Peter: [Matter-of-factly] No, that was definitely Lucy!

Percival: But, she died... of a brain aneurysm?<sup>20</sup>

Peter: Incorrect! You must have heard about a different girl.

Percival: [Still confused, trying to collect his thoughts] Okay, well I'm not sure about what just happened, but what did you want to show...

[A pause. Peter is smiling. Percival is judiciously staring at his companion.]

Percival: You wanted to show me her?

Peter: [Still smiling] Exactly! I told you that I needed to show you because you just weren't getting it.

Percival: But, how?

Peter: How what?

Percival: How is this even possible?

Peter: [Smiles, chuckles to himself] I told you— the vase doesn't break.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> The girl is dead. Peter is delusional.

<sup>20</sup> Correct. She died of a brain aneurysm.

<sup>21</sup> [Confused] I'm not sure what the breaking vase has anything to do with this. He even admitted that he couldn't bring people back from the dead, and Lucy was definitely dead. At least I thought she was. I thought Peter acknowledged the practical limits of the will to power, but I'm not sure what those are anymore.

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