

35. Ancestor Worship

Green departing and leaves falling bring morbid thoughts of giving up, storing bicycles, surety of death, and those already dead. Suburban annual gardens have lost their vibrancy and become mildewed and spotted, while weeds choke out what's once was good. Seasonal holidays echo this sentiment: Halloween between a day of dearly departed souls and martyred saints, Veteran's Day among soldier's graves, Thanksgiving for surviving thus far, and, worst of all, forced Christmas merriment to ward off Winter Solstice blues, year's darkest day, particularly when you didn't get what you hoped for all year, that shiny new bicycle, about which Bill Engvall sang. The Good Lord in His infinite wisdom somehow hadn't predicted a problem with both birth and resurrection during Nisan, first fruits, Hebrew month corresponding to Spring, so calendar despots had to reassign a pagan festival to honor birthday of Jesus. Easter could have been a fine feast, rebirth, thankful for being alive. Of course, oppressors spoil it with intense focus on crucifixion, the most horrible form of execution yet conceived to inflict merciless pain on a target of undeserved wrath. Naturally, this has been repeatedly reinforced by filmmakers who cater to those who thrive upon another's pain. Anything to kill your buzz. Worth remembering, though; should never be swept under history's rug any more than, say, Cambodia's Kymer Rouge killing fields, Nazi Holocaust of Christians and Jews, Rhodesian and Sudanese racial genocide, and way too many other equally abominable examples.

Was always glad to take a day off whenever allowed. One's main fear of major holidays was being forgotten, spending it by yourself, not that his own company didn't suffice, but isn't it much better interacting with kindly souls? Luckily, Easter is soon followed by bittersweet and not quite so painful Mother's Day. Memorial Day, another drudge but nevertheless a gateway to Summer, intervenes before something finally worth celebrating, Independence Day: barbecue, beer and fishing accidents. When unions were strong, Labor Day seemed more special, now no more than a private paramilitary party for firemen and police.

The remaining bank holidays held no special significance. Nobody cared anymore about discoverers, fathers, founders, past victories, quaint heritage, or rituals. Each generation sets a stage for their young men to succumb to testosterone fueled rage, then commemorates their loss. Wars fill cemeteries with unknown

soldiers but never resolve underlying issues. Countries that don't start wars, like modern France and Italy, had something better, national bike races, Tour de France and Giro d'Italia, respectively. Because anyone could train and try, these events were analogous to letting Americans step out onto NFL's gridiron. If they ever did, they'd get it out of their systems forever and move on to what's more important. To quote Kraftwerk's Ralf Hütter, "Holidays are an alienation, a consumption concept. To relax ourselves, we ride the bicycle, it's enough. We are liberated from holidays," although you get a sense Ralf's referring to Christmas in particular. Soccer holidays are celebrated with more enthusiasm than Christmas in many countries.

While Al was inclined to agree, Hütter misses its sentimental appeal to people's better character, "Peace on Earth to men of good will," whatever that means. Is this to say, "Let those of bad will stew in torment," and how do you define "good will"? Marley's Spirit, in *A Christmas Carol*, gave such an appeal, Dickens' finest, and as good a passage as ever recorded in English.

Said Marley, "It is required of every man that the spirit within him should walk abroad among his fellowmen, and travel far and wide; and if that spirit goes not forth in life, it is condemned to do so after death. It is doomed to wander through the world, 'Oh, woe is me!' and witness what it cannot share, but might have shared on earth, and turned to happiness!"

"But you were always a good man of business, Jacob,' faltered Scrooge..."

"Business!' cried the Ghost, wringing its hands again. 'Mankind was my business. The common welfare was my business; charity, mercy, forbearance, and benevolence, were, all, my business. The dealings of my trade were but a drop of water in the comprehensive ocean of my business!'"

Puritan ethics of industry aside, men weren't born to perform thankless tasks designed to fill another's coffers, feed casinos and lotteries, or permit a vicious chief to benefit. Deep in man's core there's a hunter who shares a kill among all tribal members simply because it won't last until tomorrow and there's too much to eat at once. Moreover, eating by yourself isn't festive, and happily a satisfied tribe is its own reward. Providers are graciously remembered long after they are gored by boars or trampled to death by herds. Huggers don't build casinos, only greedy cartels who prey on weakness, suck marrow out of communities, and toss aside stripped bones. Curiously, terrorists seldom attack chains of casinos,

government facilities, insurance headquarters, and other obvious symbols of oppression. Except in Oklahoma, they attack bazaars, bus stops, mercantiles, train platforms, wherever ordinary people engage in peaceful commerce. Similarly, the first acts of war are to knock out communications, electric plants, and water supplies, which deprives everyone in region, dissident and partisan alike. Terrorists don't even know who they are fighting, just persist because they don't know any better. When Pope came out against Islam, it got him to worry, "What next? More Crusades?" All the more reason for civil constitutional democracies to separate these combatants, who'll suck you into depraved warfare based on ancient evil and unsubstantiated rumors.

It's completely disingenuous to praise a life of someone now passed. Lacks any integrity whatever. It's so smarmy, not a lick of controversy. The dead can't defend themselves or go berserk to prove you wrong. An honest person will speak well of good souls yet living, and, thus, through an act of faith, risk their own reputation when outcomes are unknown. Saying some dead artist was beloved and special to you is the pinnacle of hollow phoniness. Equally stupid is saying, "Don't speak ill of the dead." When deceased were good, their examples are fine inspiration for those yet alive, even if nobody reads *Lives of the Saints*. When deceased were bad, they should be ground into dust, yet books about serial killers are best sellers. Pee on their grave. Better yet, never let their name be uttered. Millennia ago, to consolidate power new kings and pharaohs would efface predecessor's likeness and name from monuments. So many historians have made a living out of vilifying Hitler, this diminutive fury is worshipped by those for whom Nazism hold an allure, a pure evil of superiority which starts with personal perfection and ends with genocide. Forget Hitler, synonym for evil, but never ignore injustices against mankind which occur every day.

Most medal-of-honor winners and servicemen otherwise decorated didn't know what they were doing was heroic. They just let indoctrination and instinct take over when they found themselves in crossfires. They may or may not have done something noteworthy compared to those dying around them. Bullets somehow missed. Often what they did hardly mattered in an overall war. But generals honor them to buttress their chain of command and inspire more heroics. They give out hundreds of these things. Anyone can probably name a dozen or more medal winners, for example, former presidential candidate Kerky, whose antiwar activism afterwards seemed more heroic to him. Honorably serving

your country can take many forms. When the real war is economic, as Krushev foresaw, testifying against greed can be heroic.

This was not to say soldiers don't deserve a nation's heartfelt thanks for their hard-paid valor, but not more than anyone who gets up every day and does dangerous or difficult duties: bobbies on bicycles, fright masked samurai, knights in armor, police in riot gear, respirator equipped firemen. They all tilt balance back to level versus legions of craven, hateful, mean abusers who rape whoever crosses their path. There are criminals so evil they must never be allowed in any population. Over centuries, death sentences effectively culled out testosterone rage to create a semblance of civilization. A nation that uses its power to satisfy its people's cravings will always have enemies. Soldiering has appeal: Any relatively fit body can join, takes no judgment at all, tasks are already figured out for you; just do as you're told, muster wherever, and repeat whatever was drilled into you. No apologies, no decisions, no thinking—simplicity. Or is it? Doing exactly as you are told requires written documentation to cover your ass. National Guardsmen who had their tours in Iraq endlessly extended never signed on to be endangered every day for decades. They couldn't wait to get home to protect and serve, their original intention. Many of his childhood friends returned from 'Nam in body bags to posthumous purple hearts. Such a waste, pinning medals on corpses of selfless doers, when there's so much good yet to do.

He never blindly followed orders, since they interfered with his belief system, which underwent constant renewal. His was a religion of flux. That is to say, eventually after any extended project, he'd always hit a wall on some trivial issue and it'd result in separation. Nothing fosters new growth like scorched earth. Whether this means internal conflict, insubordination, status quo overthrow, or sudden unforeseen market demands, challenges are good as long as they don't fritter away all your effort and time, like his bicycling advocacy had. Before you burn your bridge, make sure you have a boat that floats.

Nobel laureates are those who do something so incredibly noteworthy they change entire World: Apply sciences in new ways, capture truths, develop vaccines, generate new theories, promote peace. These original thinkers never fell in line under questionable leadership. They often forsook pleasures and risked their own lives to help all mankind. They don't give Peace Nobels out with Crack-erjacks. Bet you can't name three. Remember Mandela, Mother Teresa, Schwitzer? Consider their effect, how much they suffered, and masses they helped with only good deeds and wise words.

Too bad more don't work for peace instead of war, that lowest form of diplomacy. Their stories may not make for exciting television viewing, their paths may not be what anyone else would want to tread, but they are usually more deserving of recognition than most others will ever be without ever having holstered a gun. People don't have their priorities straight. Why not? Fear of bogeymen? Media brainwashing? Saber rattling? Use power or lose it mentality? How can man's inhumanity to man ever be honorable?

They're planning a new protocol for diplomats. It would revolve around rating countries by whether they are democratic, nondemocratic or semi-democratic, presumably with some definition as to what those terms mean. In places where there's no democracy, diplomats would be obligated to contact dissidents. What if there are none? So called democracy doesn't entitle rights, nor are other forms of government necessarily despised by citizens. How about America itself? There's no democracy there either and dissidents are virtually isolated and silenced. How is this plan supposed to work? Something bugs you, complain, nothing happens, surrender, then years hence bureaucracy discovers the same thing, only now need has long since passed. You get no benefit from their ameliorations, but they'll spend tax money on it anyway, just to say they did, instead of what currently needs a nudge. If it's popular it's probably profitable, which is why they build roads but can't balance budget. Lesson is, don't mess around with transitory complaints but far reaching issues. Continuously fight big fights.

Worship of predecessors progresses naturally. Not so mutually admiring contemporaries, or seniors gushing about youthful achievers unless they're their own grandchildren. You're supposed to respect elders and teach children. People laugh at grandmas boogying to hip hop as totally out of character, expect them to foxtrot until they can't dance anymore. Pedophilic revulsion lies beneath. No one cares much what you think as long as your actions don't appear to cross moral lines they've drawn. What pedophiles see in children was really a craving to cruelly subjugate, not to love and protect. Maturity should appeal more, fully developed physically and practiced in multiple techniques from the Kama Sutra, bound to please not frustrate with fumbling incompetence. And yet, childish idiots reside in age-crippled frames and wise old souls in young bodies. You're not exempt from respect no matter when your birthday occurs, this century, before it, or before that. Imagine, there are people alive today who've spanned all 3, not since Methuselah, although dates on a calendar are just arbitrary numbers. Age doesn't automatically merit respect, only good behaviors

are worthy of recognition. You don't get a pass on decency given some amazing contribution. You get it for how you act now.

Somewhere between founding of Christianity and 1st Crusade there existed a simple concept: *Agape*. Church members, who met in secret to avoid persecution, loved and respected each other in a state of wonder—platonically, spiritually, unconditionally. It was fellowship in its purest sense, caring for those similarly minded for no more reason than this. Shepherds protect flocks of meek sheep from circling wolves. Constitutions and kings sprang from a misinterpretation of this core Christian teaching. Charities and churches shamelessly co-opt a prophet's bright vision for earthly gain.

Instincts for good are twisted into serving evil. Religions set themselves up into bastions of their congregations versus whom-ever they fear. Wasn't Christ's original vision all about embracing all humanity and showering all creeds and ethnicities with unbridled love? To paraphrase storyteller Sewell, "Any religion that does not teach practitioners to be good and kind is a sham." Furthermore, they ought to teach compassion, patience, tolerance, and to tread lightly. The last time anything like it ever occurred on Earth was among Micronesian islanders, some of whom were curious and delighted to play host to 19th Century tourists. God could have been with them, whether or not civilized men knew it. *Agape* nourished an ancient community and made faith spread, even while its prophets and members were summarily slain. Without it, there'd be no Christianity today. Yet it's now practically unknown among churchgoers. It hasn't been altogether abandoned, but is still practiced by certain Moslems as a pillar of wisdom, hospitality. This common doctrine is loathsome to those who'd pit one congregation against another. Common ground defuses all conflicts unprofitably. How else could Afatrat and Catholic cardinals collect personal billions?

A state of conflict is always preferable to peace, because peace is unprofitable, they think. This is not true. Opposite strife stands agreement, harmony, all things mutually beneficial. Most of Man's greatest advances occurred during peacetime, since war always diverts engineers and scientists into making bigger bombs, which ultimately affect all people negatively. Who do you think pays? Airplane was built well before its WWI popularity, as was Edison electric light, Morse telegraphy, refrigeration, personal computer and, of course, writing itself, a result of storing grain in community silos, something logic tells you didn't begin during times of conflict or consequent famine. Yet one might argue there's been no uniform peace since WWI, and innovation hasn't ceased. US-Soviet rivalry

urged a space race. One should only make war against drudgery, not other nations teeming with potential allies and trading partners.

While seeking unity, there will always be a need to subdue dissidents. Many are simply rich reactionaries who wish to hang onto their money and power. A taste of repression can be a motivator; sometimes it ushers in better government, or worse, as in the case of Iran. People require enough unity to fight off encroachment or invasion. But what, other than arbitrary sovereignty, obligates a Californian to take up arms for a Floridian? Ideologically, both are as far apart as citizen and invader. Neither has anything in common with New Englanders. One could declare that regions become separate countries, which would result, do doubt, in another Civil War that nobody wants. It may be easier to embrace provinces of Canada and Mexico as extra unofficial United States. Quebec would hold out for its own country, no doubt; not a problem, it would make a protected North American neutral zone akin to Switzerland. Shoreline access for export/import has become more an ideological constant for nation building than human kinship. Whoever controls docks is a group to befriend despite country of origin, creed, race or sexual orientation. Likewise, inland growers and miners feed docks with food and materials. This symbiosis is a strong unifier, but does it cross continental regions, all of which have same elements of commerce? It seems fiscal GNP and revenue that can be taxed through state unity does nothing more than makes a nation capable of waging constant warfare. The breakup of the Soviet Union defused that capability. Unity's ugly sister is pride. Cooperation despite diversity, fair international trade, preservation of human rights to make a living are higher ideals. Stepping in to assist when asked is truly noble. So far in history, empire builders came in to exploit resources and settle squabbles that might end their flow. But is this the only possible model for cooperation? Do you really need nations after all?

With his limited knowledge of doctrines and lack of interest in Thomas Aquinas, he was haunted by uncertainty and felt no right to critique religion. But he reasoned that if evil beings existed, these words would have never been written, unless, of course, his doubt spread doubt, panic or whatever else exalts evil. On the other hand, perhaps under divine protection he was guarded by angels, who, after all, are more powerful and so always prevail. Or was this only in one's afterlife? Or was evil awaiting an opportunity to twist text or destroy manuscript at the last minute? What a load of twisted nonsense, he thought. With nothing factual to provide an answer, he was forced to continue curiously and hesitantly.

What people don't know does not free them to do what's wrong. Somewhere amongst these doctrines was a notion, *conscience*, a tiny voice that insists each individual do what's right or suffer guilt. Certain mentally disturbed patients feel no remorse, hear no superego, but they are psychotic enough to be betrayed by their own dissociative behaviors. Most people, even those battle scarred and mentally defective, had a moral compass that still works, if shaken or stirred a bit. Usama Ben Gayden's compass didn't; there were no salves for pains in the asses like Ben Gayden.

Doomsayers' latest theory is that places of debauchery or religious persecution become targets for Divine retribution: such natural catastrophes as hurricanes and tsunamis. Of course, all are bound to occur at irregular intervals despite the presence of men. They single out a random occurrence and sort through generalities to concoct prophecies, particularly those that might bring local death and destruction, because who cares if it's half a world away? In rare instances when some event vaguely aligns with their prediction they gloat. Upon hearing latest prophecy, that local evil will bring God's swift sword, he mentioned Lisbon Earthquake, greatest loss of human life in recorded history, among, ostensibly, an impregnable citadel of Catholicism. Doomsayer mumbled something about plague, but doesn't that pit Gaia cleansing against intelligent design? Ha! Is there any evidence of intelligence among its proponents? Answer me: How? When? Who? News at 11:00. Otherwise, keep it to yourself. Invisible sources of retribution seem to be falling over each other to kick Mankind's collective butt. Aren't tsunamis caused by sudden collapse of sea floors? What causes voids that result in collapses? Might it be liquid oil reserves producers pump out of earth's crust elsewhere? Producers impute magma and plate shifts, convenient suspects you can't influence or predict.

Just as global warming might be caused by Man's own collective actions, so might natural disasters, or, at least, the folly of living close to an ocean's edge, where dozens of storms were known to occur anyway. North America's Eastern and Gulf coastlines are clearly shaped by recurrent storm patterns over millennia. Wisdom would adapt to this inevitability. There's easy money living by an ocean's edge, exporting and importing, but that's also where dangers and follies abound. Get over it. Assume it will happen and prepare accordingly. Expensive, fragile construction doesn't belong below sea level. Water rots wood frames and concrete masonry. If you live by the sea, live in a watertight structure.

Because none can say why things go wrong, why death is inevitable, while all is decay and decline and hardship, there were

theories codified into doctrines to be taken advantage of by men in dresses. Religions zero in on whoever's afraid, close to death, or sick, because among them it's easiest to get their messages across. Churches mop up bequests as their life blood. From these proceeds, ministers surround themselves with golden vessels, magnificent structures, mournful hymns, silk vestments, time worn ceremonies to solidify appearance and fortify power. Who would join a half-baked congregation without circumstance, pomp and regalia? Only those born into something without or so lacking humility they follow leaders who stroke their egos or form their own sect. Differences as these create chasms between followers, lead to conflict, death and devastation. And it's not only religious sects, but allegiances to tribes, cults, ethnicity, gangs, nationalism, and oppositional defiance. People don't get along well, never really have, seem totally incapable.

Moral codes are guidelines to help youth make adult decisions. They listen for awhile, still eager to learn, then mature, pay no heed, think they know everything anyway and can't learn anymore. By age 20, you already know 95% of what you'll learn in a lifetime. Unless a writer offers unique diversions or information that can help reader earn a buck to compete as a consumer, fans will be few, just compulsive readers, those who need to read everything, including fictions on cereal boxes, histories on menus, ingredients on labels. Books try to disseminate gobs of good advice. You can't save everyone. Some must die. Such decisions are directed at allies, enemies, and noncombatants alike: When to go to war? How much force to use? When to strike first? Where to deploy troops? How to mitigate but not rule out civilian casualties?

Wars are waged every day on some front, all still warfare whether justified on bases economic, military, political, race or religion. Although he prayed for peace and pleaded for them to stop, he'd not fall into arrogance of telling people how to live their lives. Wasn't the fifth evangelist, after all. What did he know? There are gaps in knowledge, inability to remember, and quandaries caused by diametrically opposed truths. Even trivial matters go badly. "Do you still need this?" is a question meant to minimize your presence; read, "Get out of my way!" There are such people who abuse their privileges, create health and visual nuisances, fill their yards with useless junk, reduce adjacent property values. But, for those who occupy tiny footprints, having collected little and organized it neatly, to ask such a question is an affront, disguised hatred, summary dismissal.

There's a myth that says you won't pass to next plane of existence until you've completed your work on this plane. Doesn't ring quite true. Many a soul died pointless deaths much too early for them to have complete a life's work—unfinished lives. Then again, maybe that's all they were destined to do, short, vibrant lives causing embarrassment and questions for those who do survive. Often those who commit suicide are trying to get even with some imagined betrayer. So sad, since there are so many threats to life already, you need not become another yourself. All you have to do is be brave and you'll be at boundless risk.

In an ancient Chinese tradition, a monster called Nian used to descend from a mountain on 1st and 15th days of each lunar month to kill and terrorize townsfolk. Frightened, they'd scatter, go home, and lock their doors each eve of Nian's return. An unlucky few would always perish. A village sage surmised that panic gave Nian confidence, and convinced others to organize against fear. On a moonless, freezing night, Nian again appeared. This time, however, villagers forced it back by beating drums, burning bamboo, and exploding firecrackers. They kept monster moving until it fell exhausted, then pounced upon and destroyed it. As intimidating and strong as Nian had been, it was no match for people who work cooperatively. Chinese to this day celebrate their victory every New Year's Day in festivals which mimic this tradition. They say "Guo Nian," which means, "Live the festival," and "Xin Nian Hao," which means, literally, "New Year Good!"

Why bare your soul? Began to think there was no soul, certainly not much evidence of any. In a confusion of instincts, people care for neighbors as they care for their offspring. They form clubs, friendships, societies. Insects swarm: shows no wisdom. Wolves run in packs: just a survival mechanism. To say humans have souls because they care for others is simply a way to express one's awe with things beyond understanding and worship before altars of mystery. Animists believe everything has a soul: creatures, rocks, trees. Doesn't prove souls exist. Devotion doubts. Love falters. Resolve wearies. Life dies. People grieve most those who did the most for them, especially, out of guilt, those they should have done more for in return. People hurt most those they love. Humans are plagued by bile and phlegm, hormones that rush through their bloodstream creating mayhem, humors urging inappropriate behaviors, giving off vapors which attack neurons resulting in poor temperaments, figuratively or literally, setting people up for a servile existence. Who's truly free unless free from primal urges, found balance, but only dead describes this condition completely.

If you can live without desire, accept whatever comes your way without passion, eat only when hungry, hoard nothing, pay as you go, then perhaps you are free. Nobody wants to be free. They accept ties that bind, call them a life. If those less broken guide and care for those more broken, there's no need of government, churches, law enforcement, or property. Architecture represent boxes that confine: cemeteries, mortuaries, prisons. That's why some of the most soaring structures of all time, cathedrals, are devoted to religion, or terminals, transportation, either way, places of departure. Thanatos, an urge to die, is closely related to independence, an urge to shrug off illegitimate constraints of subservience. "Call no man happy until dead," Greek philosophers once said. Baring one's soul is to cast off inhibitions and limitations, seek freedom. But it costs plenty. Freedom is the ultimate commodity, something only extremely wealthy individuals can afford. But once attained, they are just like any vagrant who's seen dawn through mists on an empty stomach. Guilty billionaires are always looking for ways to give money away.

Spirituality that presumes to replace religion ought not use idioms and terms of any particular religion, rather all or none. Either believe after a fashion or form your own new idioms. It can't be like dharma, conformity to one's nature, it must be dharma or not. Progressive utilitarians should adapt totally new modes of expression rather than borrow them from ancient religions. But mankind's greatest prophets always relied on simplicity, parables that dummies could grasp, homilies on farms, home, living organisms, not applied technologies or computers or dialectics, whatever that really means. This was their strength, their universality. Anything else will garner no support. Doesn't mean it's not totally true, but you cannot have democracy unless you get through to the mindless masses.

In Terry Gilliam's *The Fisher King*, an Academy Award winner and cinematic masterpiece, protagonist is a schlock jock who uses words as if they didn't mean anything. A demented listener hears broadcasts of cynicism and hate, then goes out and kills a lot of innocent club goers. Who's to blame? Aloof elites who were targeted? Callous show host? Deranged gunman? Raises important questions, especially about how outsiders are engaged and survivors cope. Can anyone who has sinned yet lives be without guilt? People feel guilty even when not at all at fault, just by not allowing themselves to be victimized, by remaining behind, by wriggling out of entanglement. Should they have been more courageous, put themselves at risk, taken a more active role in opposing evil? Or were

they just lucky, elsewhere at that time? Or was it some unknown force that spared them for a more important mission at a later date? You need an army of do-gooders to combat persistent evil at all times. A soldier who survives to fight again also serves; some exposure to battle hardens them for greater glory, hopefully off battlefields.

In the trenches there are no atheists, they say. A need for religion transcends religion itself. If you defeat an inane practice, several more spring up to fill its place. You overthrow a religion, you get dirt cults, new-age mysticism, neo-Shintoism, satanism, shamanism, snake handling sectarians, and totem worshipers, which is to say, spirituality exists outside any organized practice. Reverence is part of the fabric of human experience. Notice how there's less mayhem around houses of worship than elsewhere? Perhaps scofflaws treat hallowed ground with greater respect, but not always. Devotion plays an important part of many people's daily routine, so why not a part of their bicycling regimen? Some people might ride exclusively between church and home. Vibrations exist everywhere, and that turns some minds on. Shintos worship animate characteristics of natural objects, boulders worn smooth by rain flow, determined roots that split rock. Satanists revere selfish evil, as do all too wrapped up in arbitrage and temporary battlegrounds. People willingly admit they are superstitious, and yet deny more sensible organized doctrines. They rush to squelch any serious religious discussion, then toss spilt salt over their shoulder.

Instead of celebrating good someone is doing, people remember a scandal or single time someone lost control and vilify them for it. Who on this earth never showed a little excess enthusiasm or righteous indignation? Even Jesus trashed stalls of money lenders. They only remember you for when you were at your worst, which is to say, when you reflected back their own ill treatment of you. About the only thing that a person can do is avoid acting like a total idiot, sacrifice in silence, as depicted in Italian post war cinema *verité*. Doesn't qualify you for sainthood, though. Some people get good at this. They adopt a mellow attitude, declare how they care, displace anger into a passion for something generally considered noble or useful, like animal rights, or environmentalism, or homeless assistance. Conceit of sharing is in how it serves sharer. All these people do with this dodge is deflect scorn, avoid responsibilities for more important issues, dumb down to a manageable level, and hide fact that they're pretty damn comfortable. Can't discuss specific cheats too much; just gives cheaters

new ideas. Yet there's seems a genuine urge to do good, no matter how much the rich benefit from social status and tax breaks.

One in four people have some maladaptive behavior, so it's not rare at all. Mental disorders can be categorized. Depression, its most common form, is quite widespread. One can barely consider depression an illness, since it affects almost all at some time in their lives, and has more to do with attitude than want or wealth. Deprivation ought to motivate, not depress. A little depression is normal. It's only a problem when people let it impact their ability to care for themselves and fight on. Bipolar syndrome, manic depression, is similar, where people swing from down-in-the-dumps ennui to excessive mad activity, like driving too fast, giving out money to everyone, partying hard, overspending. It's not the same disorder, but can be just as debilitating. Daily regimen, structured activities, plus regular physical workouts are recommended. You must take up bicycling, for example. Therapists giving drugs act only as an intervention to begin healing, not a long term cure. Sometimes antidepressants and isolation drive patients to throw themselves off bridges, which is what allegedly happened to late bike activist Tooker Gombert, facing criminal charges for green activism. They found a note but never recovered body, but there's a ballad by David Rovics drifting in cyberspace. Still no lanes on Bloor or Broadway, Toronto has fallen behind other major Canadian cities; despite stagnation. It's still ahead of his state's capitol.

When his neighbor next door committed suicide, he wondered if he had tried enough to make her feel cherished. Offered to take her bicycling, always a mood mender, exchanged pleasantries, planned little mutual projects, suggested things to look forward to. Ill health probably had more to do with it, asthma from cat hair and inactivity, backlash of antidepressants, botched love life, certainly economic pressure. Mortgages are merciless. Just closed garage door and started car, yet another way to die by motor. Almost all domestic disturbances can be traced back to desperation to pay bills. A little aerobics might have helped restore her respiration. Drinking and smoking surely didn't help. Suicide is a cruel outburst that scars everyone around, spreads doubts and fears. He spent years oscillating between despair and hope, both connoting states of want with hardly any difference between them, seemingly combined in French cognate *d'espoir*. Why bother? If you really no longer value life, you can simply become fearless. There are endless hateful monsters who'd gladly take your life for their amusement. Just tell the truth and Death will forever stalk you, there now, just over your left shoulder. Look in your rear view mirror. If you're an

activist, you have to warn friends in advance you're contemplating a timely termination; otherwise corporate henchmen get away with making assassination look self inflicted.

How can you help everyone who feels depressed? How can you write as if to save anyone? He would have been content to let Gonzo carry on with killer critiques of society, but Hunter had to go and put an end to it all. This reluctant hero, edge of greatness, waiting for Godot routine is not only annoying but it sucks up your entire life. Nothing happens unless you make it happen. Why is anyone here? Is this all that every child, man and woman were bound to do: futile, repetitive tasks? What difference does all that make? Certainly any active mind questioning universe must ask them. Or is it all a big laugh echoing throughout a vast emptiness of space? Nobody that expects to get anywhere has time for depression or such questions, although all those lost days of languor do correspond to a cheap vacation or sanitarium stay. You can't let World drag you down. You can't always be in control of your career or yourself. All you can do is act enthusiastic and supportive. Be cheerful, help others gain their goals through diligent work, since securing your own survival isn't such a big deal. Something always comes up if you're patient and persistent.

Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD) sufferers fixate on doing ineffectual activities that preclude other important duties, like gamblers who just want to be playing and don't eat, drowse, fornicate or work. Or smokers who can't put down butts even though they know they're killing them. Or addicts, alcoholics, substance abusers and sometimes athletes, particularly cycling wraiths, who, stripped of normal self preservation, pursue a thrill of moving giddily through mundane, undistinguished spaces. Phobias are another manifestation, fear of crowds, outdoors, unclean situations. Compulsives and phobics repeat actions inappropriately, like checking stove or locking door 15 times. Drugs just suppress symptoms. Behavior modification sometimes works. You should uncover causes, usually bad role models or being kicked in teeth by thoughtless strangers. Society in general is so rough on individuals it's a miracle anyone at all is sane. Booze and drugs sabotage brain chemistry. Closing casinos, expecting high sin taxes be paid for alcohol and cigarettes, and legalizing drugs as pharmaceuticals to curb black market distribution might help, but early education would work better. Kids see commercials 50 times a day that promise rewards for compulsive behaviors, excessive consumption, and parents never oppose, instead become bad examples and let television act as their babysitter. Cartoons are full of evil plots and

twisted characters. Some say cutting cord and getting rid of TV altogether would increase sanity, but he didn't believe it. The best part of freedom of speech is that you don't have to listen.

Schizophrenics exhibit a number of bizarre behaviors, all related, like catatonia (a rigid unresponsive state), hebephrenia (uncontrolled laughter), megalomania (thinking you're akin to napoleon or whatever club you run makes you important), and worse, hearing god speak through a dog, split personalities, and sundry aberrations including mass murder, method of choice among dictators. Such individuals are dangers to society, should probably be hospitalized for rest of their lives or, at least, until well, if ever. Therapy might discover a root cause, generally severe childhood mental trauma from inappropriate levels of discipline, sexual abuse, substance abuse or warfare, but also chemical imbalances and organic diseases. In ancient times, schizophrenics were systematically weeded out for execution or military service, but modern society seems to reward and spawn more. In Reaction Formation, a person has no sense of remorse; this results in a consummate killing machine, James Bond. Society appreciates limited aberration when it can be used to its advantage. But soldiers become hard to reintroduce back into society, which cheers them on overseas but vilifies them when they return. Hardly fair or sensible, but life is neither. The biggest problem of mania is it breeds more, perpetuates itself generation after generation, visits children, who imitate parents. Dysfunctional becomes a lifestyle.

Christmas is an appropriate time to discuss abnormal psychology, as short days bring on aptly named SAD, Seasonal Adaptation Disorder, a form of depression caused by lack of sunshine. This is why pagan Winter Solstice was converted by church into a *merry* holiday, to alleviate general depression felt by so many. Days will soon start to lengthen, and the more you do now to get your equipment in order, the sooner riding anew can begin. Half of a cure is understanding it's common, dealt with by others, and not usually chronic, long term, only an acute episode that ends just as quickly as it starts. People usually recover, get back on course, regain their zeal for living. Give them work and tell them it's important.

So much art comes from episodes of suffering—comedies, music, paintings, tragedies—that you only consider those who've suffered as having any integrity worth notice. One righteousness exponent, Rasta poet Bob Marley wailed, "Emancipate yourselves from mental slavery/none but ourselves can free our minds/All I ever had, redemption songs/songs of freedom." Must music lift your spirits as if Christmas carols? Or should some suit your mood?

Certainly, there are so many songs that you could orchestrate every crevasse of your psyche with a matching strain, from calm to mania, representing a gamut of experience from slow ambiance to testosterone fueled clashes. Funny how extremely quiet, unadorned *chants* lull and somehow depress. Most rather hear a cheery piece affirming life. But whole genres were exactly the opposite, *grindcore*, *grunge*, *hip hop*, *rap*. Some fill a bike deprivation void, Marley's "Concrete Jungle". There's even music to be dead to, for example, Glennie's "Land of Vendon"; lasts for an eternity and frightens you with sounds you never heard before, some of which resemble bat wings or ringtones or slashes out of nowhere. What spawns *brutal death metal*? Much of it comes from Detroit, not surprisingly. Satan worshipping bands, like Bascovsky's Derketa or Eviscium, exist below grave bottoms, underground, where they feed like worms on car-nage, millions who die yearly in collisions, true meaning of death metal, after all. Some crack heads believe drug perversions privilege them for some esoteric knowledge the masses aren't. If it wasn't so sadly stylized it would be laughable.

There's *ambient*, *eai* (electroacoustic improvisation) and *lower-case* devoid of standout solos, thus a contributory melding that abhors arrogance, a so-called collective effort. He was aware of many divergent wrinkles, but master to none of them; but, then, who was? When tone of surrounding human voices became too snappish, he'd put on circumaural headphones that blot out all distractions from songs he'd spin, preferably something frenetic enough to escape any chance for another sound to leak in. Emo and folk made you think or tugged at heartstrings, too invasive for tuning out. Shouldn't one allow in only what heals or strengthens, remain placid amidst outrage? Depression can be fatal, after all.

A person could be wonderfully integral without horribly suffering, but you'd never notice them based on crazy conventions of modern society, reinforced by newsmen who thrive on conflict. A Johns Hopkins psychiatric professor validates benefits of dark energies, restless passions, turmoil, and concludes life otherwise would be boring. Hardly anyone isn't touched by tragic loss of life from earthquakes, fires, tsunamis, or weapons of mass destruction, which, from the gratuitous violence of *Lord of War*, you recognize are not nukes but millions of assault rifles gladly sold by gun runners to barbarians. Innocent human beings are felled as if sheaves of wheat and nobody cares much, especially those manufacturing the arms, the 5 countries who are permanent members of the United Nations Security Council, a body sworn to uphold the dignity and sanctity of life. This truly is something to mourn.

America's decision to drop a nuclear weapon on Hiroshima probably checked Russian ambitions, definitely stifled Russian participation in victory, and kept Stalin from carving up and occupying Japan, which would have ended in terrible purges. Did Japan a favor, but ending a war is always problematic. To show weakness and not decisively win shortens interval between wars. Yet terrible consequences don't deter terrorists, who wish to provoke them on their own terms then profit from results. If you can't avoid war, how are profiteering arms dealers any different from terrorists?

Not to excuse or minimize grief they cause, less than 1% of Americans become victims of violent crimes (assault, homicide, rape, theft) about half of which are perpetrated by intimates. Murders are generally one-on-one dances, 8:100,000, possibly as many as 20,000 each year. Television programs fret over them, scientifically dissect every detail, wring moral hands for degree of heinous. More imaginary murders occur in fiction than in real life, thus inspiring more. Real motoring fatalities more than double that number, yet hardly anyone takes offense and little is done to staunch the relentless bloodletting.

Given general derangement, you have to make it hard for strangers to be unkind to you. He'd avoid dark and lonely stretches. He'd strip his bike every store he'd enter, unless he could put bike within arm's length or constant view. Hardly ever left bike exposed for any length of time even if locked for fear someone might vandalize it. This is why many won't consider bicycling, because motor wackos resent it and can make their displeasure known in many merciless ways, although ways to sabotage mo-ves are countless.

Felt lucky that he had a unique situation; he commuted by bike to where he worked as keeper of a walk-in vault, an unparalleled place to park out of harm's way, even charge battery during day. Used to take 8 hours to charge for 2 hours runtime. New lights with much better batteries took only 3.5 hours for 3.5 hours runtime, so he could recharge after a roundtrip, and not have to keep a charger at work or carry between. New light's beam pattern was the best he'd seen, a bright circle in center and unobstructed peripheral glow to about 120°. On rear he put a big Vistalite; lasted about 6 months on 2 AA batteries flashing daily for an hour at a time. Found taping seams kept it dry and kept red lenscap from popping off on bumps. Snap-ons didn't do it, but it was otherwise a big, bright device that worked for awhile. Like most products, this model was designed for sale, not actual use, and later broke, so had to be replaced with a Blackburn, 4 times brighter at half the size, with a cap that could be screwed down and made watertight.

One night he saw some thugs hanging around with a flashing light on a part of bikeway beyond where patrols would chase them out. Suspected they were looking for trouble, but was headed home another way anyway. Years later, after being assaulted by a gang with baseball bats, he learned how sensible it is to be suspicious. Instead of going directly, toured adjacent plats looking at people's holiday light displays. Wasn't as nice as ride he once did in a Boston suburb, but fun nevertheless. Had an incident with more punks in a car. They blared horn and peeled ahead. While waiting for a red light across from a patrol car, he passed them again and gave a good stare at blank expressions. Driver didn't know what to think or do in front of a cop. People need to be reminded that their horrible behaviors aren't normal; victims are humans, not Doom demons to be blown away, or electronic enemies that only exist in virtuality. Everything you do or don't has consequences, including despair, impassivity, and rudeness. If you push bicyclists off roads, they drive instead, make you wait longer in traffic, pollute air, ruin your children's chance to survive. Non-motorists are nicer, do you a huge favor, merit respect and royal treatment while alive.

He didn't plan rides beyond his abilities, something that might inconvenience others, who'd have to bail him out. He made each plan based on current fitness, equipment condition, forecast and other known factors. Riding with a few others could allow plan to be a little more extreme, because they represented extra support. When riding alone, he could always extend a ride if it was too short given prevailing conditions; he generally included some purposeful stops, like bike shops, cemetery, library, printers, supermarkets, or visits to family and friends. Everyone enjoys attention, a good way to get you out of your own doldrums, to behold another's suffering and ease their pain, or pray. Society doesn't recommend self-directed charitable acts, would rather institutionalize them for monetary gain, like a flat century to fill someone else's pockets or plans that persist from parent to offspring. Mental disease can be inherited. Best to only honor ancestors who pass along compassion.

