

# *Philosophy Ripped From The Headlines!*



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**Compiled & Edited by *Philosophy Without Borders***

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# 1. “Hunter S. Thompson’s Letter on Finding Your Purpose and Living a Meaningful Life”

*Farnam Street*, 2014, Re-Posted on *Medium*, FEBRUARY 2018

URL = <https://www.fs.blog/2014/05/hunter-s-thompson-to-hume-logan/>



In April of 1958, Hunter S. Thompson was 22 years old when he wrote this letter to his friend Hume Logan in response to a request for life advice.

Thompson's letter, found in [Letters of Note](#), offers **some of the most thoughtful and profound advice I've ever come across.**

April 22, 1958  
57 Perry Street  
New York City

Dear Hume,

You ask advice: ah, what a very human and very dangerous thing to do! For to give advice to a man who asks what to do with his life implies something very close to egomania. To presume to

point a man to the right and ultimate goal— to point with a trembling finger in the RIGHT direction is something only a fool would take upon himself.

I am not a fool, but I respect your sincerity in asking my advice. I ask you though, in listening to what I say, to remember that all advice can only be a product of the man who gives it. What is truth to one may be disaster to another. I do not see life through your eyes, nor you through mine. If I were to attempt to give you specific advice, it would be too much like the blind leading the blind.

*“To be, or not to be: that is the question: Whether ’tis nobler in the mind to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, or to take arms against a sea of troubles ... ” (Shakespeare)*

And indeed, that IS the question: whether to float with the tide, or to swim for a goal. It is a choice we must all make consciously or unconsciously at one time in our lives. So few people understand this! Think of any decision you’ve ever made which had a bearing on your future: I may be wrong, but I don’t see how it could have been anything but a choice however indirect— between the two things I’ve mentioned: the floating or the swimming.

But why not float if you have no goal? That is another question. It is unquestionably better to enjoy the floating than to swim in uncertainty. So how does a man find a goal? Not a castle in the stars, but a real and tangible thing. How can a man be sure he’s not after the “big rock candy mountain,” the enticing sugar-candy goal that has little taste and no substance?

The answer— and, in a sense, the tragedy of life— is that we seek to understand the goal and not the man. We set up a goal which demands of us certain things: and we do these things. We adjust to the demands of a concept which CANNOT be valid. When you were young, let us say that you wanted to be a fireman. I feel reasonably safe in saying that you no longer want to be a fireman. Why? Because your perspective has changed. It’s not the fireman who has changed, but you. Every man is the sum total of his reactions to experience. As your experiences differ and multiply, you become a different man, and hence your perspective changes. This goes on and on. Every reaction is a learning process; every significant experience alters your perspective.

So it would seem foolish, would it not, to adjust our lives to the demands of a goal we see from a different angle every day? How could we ever hope to accomplish anything other than galloping neurosis?

The answer, then, must not deal with goals at all, or not with tangible goals, anyway. It would take reams of paper to develop this subject to fulfillment. God only knows how many books have been written on “the meaning of man” and that sort of thing, and god only knows how many people have pondered the subject. (I use the term “god only knows” purely as an expression.) There’s very little sense in my trying to give it up to you in the proverbial nutshell, because I’m the first to admit my absolute lack of qualifications for reducing the meaning of life to one or two paragraphs.

I’m going to steer clear of the word “existentialism,” but you might keep it in mind as a key of sorts. You might also try something called [Being and Nothingness](#) by Jean-Paul Sartre, and

another little thing called [Existentialism: From Dostoyevsky to Sartre](#). These are merely suggestions. If you're genuinely satisfied with what you are and what you're doing, then give those books a wide berth. (Let sleeping dogs lie.) But back to the answer. As I said, to put our faith in tangible goals would seem to be, at best, unwise. So we do not strive to be firemen, we do not strive to be bankers, nor policemen, nor doctors. WE STRIVE TO BE OURSELVES.

But don't misunderstand me. I don't mean that we can't BE firemen, bankers, or doctors— but that we must make the goal conform to the individual, rather than make the individual conform to the goal. In every man, heredity and environment have combined to produce a creature of certain abilities and desires— including a deeply ingrained need to function in such a way that his life will be MEANINGFUL. A man has to BE something; he has to matter.

As I see it then, the formula runs something like this: a man must choose a path which will let his ABILITIES function at maximum efficiency toward the gratification of his DESIRES. In doing this, he is fulfilling a need (giving himself identity by functioning in a set pattern toward a set goal), he avoids frustrating his potential (choosing a path which puts no limit on his self-development), and he avoids the terror of seeing his goal wilt or lose its charm as he draws closer to it (rather than bending himself to meet the demands of that which he seeks, he has bent his goal to conform to his own abilities and desires).

In short, he has not dedicated his life to reaching a pre-defined goal, but he has rather chosen a way of life he KNOWS he will enjoy. The goal is absolutely secondary: it is the functioning toward the goal which is important. And it seems almost ridiculous to say that a man MUST function in a pattern of his own choosing; for to let another man define your own goals is to give up one of the most meaningful aspects of life— the definitive act of will which makes a man an individual.

Let's assume that you think you have a choice of eight paths to follow (all pre-defined paths, of course). And let's assume that you can't see any real purpose in any of the eight. THEN— and here is the essence of all I've said— you MUST FIND A NINTH PATH.

Naturally, it isn't as easy as it sounds. You've lived a relatively narrow life, a vertical rather than a horizontal existence. So it isn't any too difficult to understand why you seem to feel the way you do. But a man who procrastinates in his CHOOSING will inevitably have his choice made for him by circumstance.

So if you now number yourself among the disenchanteds, then you have no choice but to accept things as they are, or to seriously seek something else. But beware of looking for goals: look for a way of life. Decide how you want to live and then see what you can do to make a living WITHIN that way of life. But you say, "I don't know where to look; I don't know what to look for."

And there's the crux. Is it worth giving up what I have to look for something better? I don't know— is it? Who can make that decision but you? But even by DECIDING TO LOOK, you go a long way toward making the choice.

If I don't call this to a halt, I'm going to find myself writing a book. I hope it's not as confusing as it looks at first glance. Keep in mind, of course, that this is MY WAY of looking at things. I happen to think that it's pretty generally applicable, but you may not. Each of us has to create our own credo— this merely happens to be mine.

If any part of it doesn't seem to make sense, by all means call it to my attention. I'm not trying to send you out "on the road" in search of Valhalla, but merely pointing out that it is not necessary to accept the choices handed down to you by life as you know it. There is more to it than that— no one HAS to do something he doesn't want to do for the rest of his life. But then again, if that's what you wind up doing, by all means convince yourself that you HAD to do it. You'll have lots of company.

And that's it for now. Until I hear from you again, I remain,

your friend,  
Hunter

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## ONE Follow-Up:

Is the following argument sound? If so, why? If not, why not?

1. Human life has some sort of meaning, purpose, and value.
2. Although human life has *some* sort of meaning, purpose, and value, nevertheless it has no *single, univocal* meaning, purpose, and value, *outside* human life itself, that is applicable to *everyone* in just the same way.
3. Therefore, each person has *to create and disclose meaning, purpose, and value for herself or himself, by actively striving throughout their lives to become a unique individual*, no matter what the particular path to that self-realizing goal might be.
4. Failing that, people's lives are mostly absurd, inauthentic, and pointless.

## ONE Link:

1. "The Meaning of Life"

URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/life-meaning/>

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## 2. “Philosophers are Building Ethical Algorithms to Help Control Self-Driving Cars”

By Olivia Goldhill

*Quartz*, 11 FEBRUARY 2018

URL = <https://qz.com/1204395/self-driving-cars-trolley-problem-philosophers-are-building-ethical-algorithms-to-solve-the-problem/>



Self-driving cars are a myriad ethical quandaries on wheels. (AP Photo/Tony Avelar)

Artificial intelligence experts and roboticists aren't the only ones working on the problem of autonomous vehicles. Philosophers are also paying close attention to the development of what, from their perspective, looks like a myriad of ethical quandaries on wheels.

The field has been particularly focused over the past few years on one particular philosophical problem posed by self-driving cars: They are a [real-life enactment of a moral conundrum](#) known as the Trolley Problem. In this classic scenario, a trolley is going down the tracks towards five people. You can pull a lever to redirect the trolley, but there is one person stuck on the only alternative track. The scenario exposes the moral tension between actively doing versus allowing harm: Is it morally acceptable to kill one to save five, or should you allow five to die rather than actively hurt one?

Though the Trolley Problem sounds farfetched, autonomous vehicles will be unable to avoid comparable scenarios. If a car is in a situation where any action will put either the car passenger or someone else in danger—if there's a truck crash ahead and the only options are to swerve into a motorbike or off a cliff—then how should the car be programmed to respond?

Rather than pontificating on this, a group of philosophers have taken a more practical approach, and are building algorithms to solve the problem. Nicholas Evans, philosophy professor at Mass Lowell, is working alongside two other philosophers and an engineer to write algorithms based

on various ethical theories. Their work, supported by a [\\$556,000 grant from the National Science Foundation](#), will allow them to create various Trolley Problem scenarios, and show how an autonomous car would respond according to the ethical theory it follows.

To do this, Evans and his team are turning ethical theories into a language that can be read by computers. Utilitarian philosophers, for example, believe all lives have equal moral weight and so an algorithm based on this theory would assign the same value to passengers of the car as to pedestrians. There are others who believe that you have a perfect duty to protect yourself from harm. “We might think that the driver has some extra moral value and so, in some cases, the car is allowed to protect the driver even if it costs some people their lives or puts other people at risk,” Evans said. As long as the car isn’t programmed to intentionally harm others, some ethicists would consider it acceptable for the vehicle to swerve in defense to avoid a crash, even if this puts a pedestrian’s life at risk.

Evans is not currently taking a stand on which moral theory is right. Instead, he hopes the results from his algorithms will allow others to make an informed decision, whether that’s by car consumers or manufacturers. Evans isn’t currently collaborating with any of the companies working to create autonomous cars, but hopes to do so once he has results.

Perhaps Evans’s algorithms will show that one moral theory will lead to more lives saved than another, or perhaps the results will be more complicated. “It’s not just about how many people die but which people die or whose lives are saved,” says Evans. It’s possible that two scenarios will save equal numbers of lives, but not of the same people.

“The difference between theory A and theory B is that the people who die in the first theory are mostly over 50 and the people who die in the second theory are mostly under 30,” Evans said. “Then we have to have a discussion as a society about not just how much risk we’re willing to take but who we’re willing to expose to risk.”

If some moral theories save drivers while other protect pedestrians, then there could be a discussion about which option is best. “We could also have a discussion about how we build our traffic infrastructure,” adds Evans, perhaps with a greater separation between pedestrians and drivers.

Evans is also interested in further research on how any set of values used to program self-driving cars could be hacked. For example, if a car will swerve to avoid pedestrians even if this puts the driver at risk, then someone could intentionally put themselves in the path of an autonomous vehicle to harm the driver. Evans says even an infrared laser could be used to confuse the car’s sensory system and so cause a crash. Then there are further questions, such as how differently-programmed cars might react with each other while they’re on the road.

Evans is not the only academic researching how to address self-driving cars’ version of the Trolley Problem. Psychologists are also working on the issue, and have [researched which solution the majority of the public would prefer](#).



But while Evans is focused on Trolley Problem-type scenarios, he acknowledges that simply figuring out the solution for such specific situations does not address the broader issues of whether autonomous cars are ethical. For example, when such cars are rolled out and are on the road alongside current vehicles, they will be something of an experiment in how our transit systems work. Others on the road could be deeply uncomfortable with this.

“One of the hallmarks of a good experiment in medicine, but also in science more generally, is that participants are able to make informed decisions about whether or not they want to be part of that experiment,” he said. “Hopefully, some of our research provides that information that allows people to make informed decisions when they deal with their politicians.”

Patrick Lin, philosophy professor at Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo, is one of the few philosophers who’s examining the ethics of self-driving cars outside the Trolley Problem. There are concerns about advertising (could cars be programmed to drive past certain shops shops?), liability (who is responsible if the car is programmed to put someone at risk?), social issues (drinking could increase once drunk driving isn’t a concern), and privacy (“an autonomous car is basically big brother on wheels,” Lin said.) There may even be negative consequences of otherwise positive results: If autonomous cars increase road safety and fewer people die on the road, will this lead to fewer organ transplants?

Autonomous cars will likely have massive unforeseen effects. “It’s like predicting the effects of electricity,” Lin said. “Electricity isn’t just the replacement for candles. Electricity caused so many things to come to life—institutions, cottage industries, online life. Ben Franklin could not have predicted that, no one could have predicted that. I think robotics and AI are in a similar category.”

The invention of standard cars, for example, gave us the rise of the suburbs and fast food drive-through restaurants. Perhaps autonomous cars will lead to people living further away. The time humans once spent driving could be replaced by leisure while in driverless cars, but this is also highly uncertain. “Nature abhors a vacuum. When you have free time, that usually gets sucked up by work,” Lin said.

Meanwhile, autonomous cars’ efficient driving could reduce traffic. “Or, it could get worse. People could take more unnecessary trips, and further clog up the streets,” Lin said. “I don’t think anyone has a crystal ball when it comes to extrapolating that far out. It’s a safe bet to say that we can’t imagine the scale of effects.” Ultimately, the effects of autonomous cars will likely be huge and unpredictable. No algorithm or philosophical theory can make driverless cars perfectly moral.

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## **ONE Follow-Up:**

Is the following argument sound? If so, why? If not, why not?

1. Let us suppose that the advent of automated, self-driving (aka *autonomous*) cars is practically inevitable, at least in certain kinds of transportation contexts and environments.
2. Then autonomous cars should be programmed so that, in the event of unavoidable accidents, they maximize the number of people saved, even if it entails killing some innocent bystanders, provided that the number of people killed is significantly lower than the number of people saved.
3. But most people believe that there is a class of cases in which it is morally impermissible to kill innocent bystanders, *even if by doing so it saves the lives of many more people*.
4. Moral philosophers have thought long and hard about this general problem, which is called “the trolley problem.”
5. Therefore, algorithms designed by moral philosophers, based on their study of The Trolley Problem, should be incorporated into the programs of all autonomous cars.

## **ONE Link:**

1. “Trolley Problem”

URL = [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trolley\\_problem](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trolley_problem)

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### 3. “Dread Accompanies Me Through Life, But It is Not Without Consolation”

By Samir Chopra

*Aeon*, FEBRUARY 2018

URL = <https://aeon.co/essays/dread-accompanies-me-through-life-but-it-is-not-without-consolation>



*Farewell* (1914) by August Macke. Museum Ludwig, Cologne. *Photo courtesy Wikipedia*

One morning, my father died at home. I awoke to a call for help – my name shouted once, loudly, desperately, fearfully, by my mother – ran into my parents’ bedroom, and found my father convulsing in the throes of a massive heart attack. His body bucked on a deadly trampoline, his chest heaved, spittle flecked his lips and the sides of his mouth as he desperately sought to fill his lungs with air. By the time our friendly family doctor arrived, stethoscope and black bag in tow, my father was dead. A dashing pilot and war hero, he had flown supersonic fighter jets in two wars, evaded anti-aircraft fire and airborne interceptors, only to come home and die as his wife and two sons looked on helplessly. Bullets and shells had missed their mark; a clogged artery, a fragment of plaque, had not. He was 43 years old. I was 12.

Fourteen years later, after a protracted struggle with breast cancer that included a disfiguring mastectomy, adjuvant chemotherapy, blasts of directed radiation, hormonal treatment, and a four-year remission, my mother, too, succumbed and passed away. Her last days were painful, mind-numbingly so. She was nauseated, incoherent, delirious, sleepless, her skin yellowed by her failing liver, her lungs crushed. The morphine we asked her doctors to administer made her catatonic and slowed her pulse to a barely discernible crawl. I had become unrecognisable to her; she to me. She was 52 years old. I was 26.

When my parents died, a fundamental, metaphysical sundering between the world and me took place. Lightning had struck twice. The gravity the world had promised – the anchoring of my flights of anxious fancy – had disappeared. The world was now treacherous, lurking with pitfalls, crevasses and trapdoors. The world of misfortune was once dimly glimpsed, its details barely visible, but now I lived in it. I had imagined that with my father's death, the world had exacted its pound of flesh, a tax so terrible it would be levied only once. But in 14 years, death came calling again. One God – a child's God, mythical and compassionate – died with my father; another – an adult's God, a God of reasonableness, the one that ensured this world would not do excessively badly by you – died with my mother.

My parents' deaths, occupying polar positions on a spectrum of suddenness, infected my life with a persistent dread; they suffused my life with an incurable anxiety, a dread that did not require an identifiable object. Their deaths taught me that this world is ruled by merciless probabilities: there are no warnings attached to daybreak that this might be the day of catastrophic misfortune, of fatal eventuality. In her memoir *The Year of Magical Thinking* (2007), Joan Didion wrote that recollections of disaster always begin with the mundane nature of the day; the day my father died, the day my mother's cancer was diagnosed, began as ordinary ones before becoming extraordinary and world-historical. I learned the hard way that there is cause and occasion to fret, to feel anxious, even when there is no indication of disaster. The universe, if not actively malignant, is indifferent to our fates, and cares little for our lives and loves.

Anxiety is insidious, more than just a simple fear. It is, all at once, a fever and an occupation, an affliction and a constitution. An anxiety is a lens through which to view the world, a colouration that grants the sufferer's experiences their distinctive hue. The Buddha alerted us to a fundamental metaphysical feature of this world, the 'co-dependent arising' of all that we experience and know. That is, nothing possesses existence independent of all else that makes it so: an anxious person inhabits a world coloured and contoured by their own, highly individual anxieties; it is a world co-constructed by the sufferer and his or her anxieties. Anxiety is therefore a perspective, a hermeneutical relationship with the world, whose text now gets read in a very peculiar way by this anxiety-laden vision. Things and persons and events fall into focus depending on their interactions with our anxieties: that man in the corner becomes threatening, this chair becomes unstable and unbalanced, that food becomes the agent of a fatal illness, my family – my wife, my daughter – appear as targets for cruel twists of fate. I live in a distinctive world shaded and illuminated by an idiosyncratic anxiety.

I began therapy at 29. During the five years of visits to the clinics that followed – two sessions a week of interpersonal, psychodynamic and Kleinian psychotherapy – I 'found out' that I had

always been an anxious child, that I had not started being anxious at the time of my father's death, that in some measure, my anxiety marked me out as a fellow sufferer to all humans. My anxieties had become worse; my parents' deaths traumatised a subject primed to be so. Their deaths had interrupted a continuum of development in which I would have separated myself from my parents 'naturally'; as the psychologist Rollo May would have put it, those deaths had threatened values that I held essential to my existence. In the clinic and on the couch, I 'found out' that anxiety is fertile, capable of bringing forth newer versions, ever more novel imprints of itself. Prompted by the production of new traumas and losses in our lives, anxieties can interact and recombine like viruses to form newer 'strains' that course through us, surprising us with their ferocity and visceral feel. We should not expect our anxieties to remain the same as we age; by paying close attention to their nature, their 'look and feel', we can track changes in ourselves and our 'table of values'.

Anxiety is not singular; individual anxieties make up a sufferer's full complement. An anxiety might be a distinctive suite packaged for application to a particular situation of time, place, circumstance and connotation. To know oneself is, very often, an injunction to know one's anxieties – individually, distinctively – and to know how they change and morph as we do. I have learned, partially, which environments provoke and sustain my anxieties; my future steps are circumscribed by this induced caution. My trajectory through the world is thus informed, at every step, by the anxieties that afflict me.

Anxieties are not immortal. Some die on their own, subdued by exposure to enough recalcitrant facts about the world to make some terrors untenable. Moreover, anxieties are not impervious to relief: sometimes an 'all will be well' missive arrives from origins unknown. At that moment, the fog lifts, the burden eases, and an exhilarating giddiness makes its presence felt. The clarity of that moment is intensely pleasurable, so pronounced is the relief from the anxiety's chafing that had preceded it. The drooping shoulder lifts, there is a slight spring in the step. Caffeine, alcohol and marijuana can induce this effect, a pleasing trait that partially accounts for their perennial popularity across cultures and civilisations. I have flirted with these palliatives, pushing them to the boundaries of their use. But when they ran out, anxiety returned. I then felt a painful, tender nostalgia for the comfort of the ones I love. Thus did I find out how acutely fear of loneliness and abandonment underwrote my anxieties. I abstain from alcohol now, because I cannot handle the anxieties associated with excessive drinking: anxiety was never conquered, it just gave way in the face of a greater one. As Friedrich Nietzsche noted in *The Dawn of Day* (1881), to master a drive, we need another just as strong, just as needy and demanding. But the 'victory' of that drive also informs us of its existence. We might be surprised to find out what else lurks within us.

Sigmund Freud suggested in 1895 that the purpose of therapy was to get us from hysterical misery to common unhappiness, and a key component of that movement is the attention paid to anxiety. Therapy, accordingly, did not comfort or 'cure' me. I had hoped to learn that 'simple' trauma had caused my anxiety, but instead I learned that anxiety was constitutive of my being: I respond with anxiety to this world's offerings. I'm a better person for this knowledge of myself.

We are rational animals, but implicit in that rationality is an anxiety. The rational animal remembers and has learned from its past; it anticipates and plans for its future; it modifies its

present, anxiously, in response to these memories and anticipations; it is anxious to avoid mistakes, even those it cannot remember and has consigned to the unconscious forgotten. If memory, as John Locke suggested in 1690, is constitutive of our personal identities, then so are our anxieties. The Buddha and David Hume considered the self to be a bundle of ever-changing perceptions and thoughts and images. Similarly, I propose a ‘self-as-bundled-anxieties’ theory: we are a bundle of anxieties; by examining them, to see what vexes us, what makes us anxious, we come to know who we are. Anxiety is a reminder that our selves are rather more diffuse and disorderly than we might imagine, that there are more bits to be seized as they swirl ‘about’ and ‘inside’ us.

Søren Kierkegaard suggested in *The Concept of Anxiety* (1844) that one of existentialism’s hard-fought rewards – our encounters with true freedom – comes with the terrible burden of encounters with [dread](#) and anxiety. This burden, he claimed, was one we should ‘happily’ bear. It is our own cross, and we will find ourselves by our willingness to go forth with it, along the paths of our choosing. Kierkegaard thus enabled an understanding of the value of the most persistent, enduring and subtle of existential responses: unease with the unrealised universe of our lives. There would be little to no anxiety if our lives were mapped out with trajectories and actions articulated for us to follow, with fates and fortunes predetermined and predestined.

Instead, confrontations with existential anxiety take place at the boundaries of each instant of our lives, each experienced as free. Anxiety, Kierkegaard suggests, is present in the movement from possibility to actuality, from the present to the future. Our confrontations with anxiety hold the possibility of self-discovery – what are we capable of, what might we do? Will we have the strength to bear up to the consequences, intended or otherwise, of our actions? To move on with our lives despite the discomfort of these encounters is, for Kierkegaard, the basis of selfhood.

The psychic burden of anxiety is offset by the gains in self-knowledge it affords; to experience anxiety is to experience our self in the making. To allow ourselves to experience anxiety is to engage in a self-observation sensitive to one’s deepest affective responses, alert to the shapelessness of our lives – and our responsibility for mapping our lives anew at every step. This freedom to create ourselves, the subject, is also the vulnerability of the object to which things happen. We dread what we might become, both by our own agency and by the imprint of the world on us.

Perhaps then, anxiety – precisely because it affords a moment for discovery, reconceptualisation and self-construction – should not be medicated out of existence. (Blaise Pascal noted in *Penseés* (1670) that people employed ‘diversions’ to escape ‘thoughts of themselves’.) Anxiety is, of course, unpleasant, and all too easily triggers the palliative responses of intoxication or medication. So medication might be necessary when anxiety becomes neurotic and crippling – a distinction present in Kierkegaard – but, as May points out, it is an ‘illogical belief’ that mental health consists in being anxiety-free.

Instead, living with the felt experience of anxiety, a conscious ‘wallowing’ and ‘inspection’ can enable an investigation of the self and the particular economy of its lived life. Anxiety, as Kierkegaard claimed, is a ‘school’ for the self. When we meditate, we allow ourselves to feel our anxieties; they rush into the mental spaces we leave open, reminding us of all that can go

terribly, terribly wrong; they wash over us, almost making us leap out of our meditative postures. But, there too, while meditating, we can closely inspect the nature of the beast. As Freud might suggest, to medicate anxiety away could indicate a resistance underwritten by fear of finding out who we are. Smashing idols is never easy.

The most significant aspect of Kierkegaard's suggestion that we pay attention to anxiety is that by noticing it, and talking about it, and acknowledging it, not as pathology but as an informative part of ourselves, it becomes not something to be expelled, but to be welcomed as a message from ourselves. To stop and respond to anxiety's challenge is to accept dialogue with ourselves. There is a Nietzschean note here: we must display *amor fati*, a love of fate; we must 'own' our anxiety as part of us, to be integrated and deployed to make our lives what we wish them to be. Acceptance of anxiety is the acceptance of the Buddhist Noble Truth that suffering is ever-present in our lives, and to integrate that anxiety into our sense of ourselves is akin to the many therapeutic manoeuvres that the Buddha recommended for us along the Eight-Fold Path of Action and Righteous Duty. It is a movement from being an 'unskilled' practitioner of this life's arts to being a skilled one.

Anxiety taught me the place that death has in my life. Death's early presence ensured that every loss in my life – migration included – would be coloured by the deadly fear evoked by the most terrible losses of all, those of my parents; nothing has been quite as formative of my philosophical dispositions as those twinned blows. After my mother passed away, a fundamental crisis overcame me: I realised that I was 'free' as never before. I had understood my life till then as bound up with my parents. Perhaps I had to aspire to their standards, perhaps I had to seek their approval, perhaps I had to live life less recklessly because of their sensitivities. Now, all such barriers were removed, I was free to 'do whatever I want, any old time'. I could put myself out of my misery, secure in the knowledge that my parents would not have to grieve the loss of their precious son. This realisation provoked a terror all of its own; it was the first time I experienced true dread, the first time I understood what the existentialists had been getting at.

The upending of this world's order by my parents' deaths and my resultant anxiety made me suffer a conceptual shift in my understanding of its workings; it became a philosophical commonplace for me to believe in claims about this world's malleability through our conscious, emotional, not-entirely rational understanding of it. My parents' deaths taught me that this world was quicksand built on quicksand, that talk of certainty was laughable, that all things came to be and passed away, that God did not exist, that there were no truths more vital than love, that all we wanted was companionship and spiritual solace. I found myself drawn to philosophical theories that assured me there was no meaning or value to life save the ones we gave it, ones that told me there was no predetermined purpose to my existence. To believe that there was a final end to my life, a purpose, a destination, an intended teleology, was to be infected with an anxiety that I was not fulfilling my purpose in life, that I was 'wasting' my life. That anxiety could be relieved only by convincing myself that this life was purposeless, that I could never snatch defeat from the jaws of victory. Curiously enough, this thought was more sustaining than airy directives for how to seek out the Truth about Reality and the Being that underlay it.

These philosophical doctrines provided actual, real psychic relief. By raising the possibility of this life's meaninglessness, they eased the terrible, anxiety-provoking thought of a pre-existent

meaning, value and essence not discoverable or realisable by me. In a world with no ‘wrong’ decisions, there would not be the anxieties of cognitive dissonance either. I realised the therapeutic value of such philosophising and embraced it. My anxious state made me receptive to it; it prepared the intellectual ground by saturating it with an emotional and affective field sustained by an acute anxiety. Philosophy done in this therapeutic fashion is not a shameful state of affairs, it is precisely as it should be: philosophy employed to teach us a better way to live, to dispel those illusions and delusions that make this life harder than it needs to be.

Because of my anxieties, I have come to understand why I’m the philosopher I am, why I hold the views I do, why I do not trust that there is an inherent, essential, meaning or purpose to life. My anxiety is intimately related to a hard-won knowledge about this world’s eternally changing nature, one that often runs afoul of human plans, intentions, attachments or relationships; it informs me that it cannot be so, and it is no less valuable for that as a source of my knowledge. Why privilege some supposedly logical inference over *this*? Inferences and realisations are prompted by new inputs received, new beliefs formed, new inferences made. We might find ourselves forced toward the conclusion of a train of thought by anxiety, compelling us to move on till we face the truth of that which made us anxious.

My anxieties tell me I’m still capable of feeling. They provide an acute reminder that I’m alive and responsive, and yes, anxious. My anxieties about my family inform me that I have let myself become wrapped up in their selves; they inform me of the boundaries I have formed around and about myself; they inform me of what my self is. They inform me of the risibility of the claim that we are isolated beings whose boundaries terminate at our fingertips, at the surface of our skins. Thus does anxiety inform me of who I am.

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## ONE Follow-Up:

Is the following argument sound? If so, why? If not, why not?

1. Everyone is occasionally anxious about something or another, but some people suffer from almost constant anxiety.
2. A common belief about the experience of anxiety is that it is purely a psychopathological condition that always needs to be *cured*, by altogether removing it or radically suppressing it, either by psychotherapy (e.g., Freudian) or drugs.
3. But some philosophers, for example, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, have compellingly argued that the experience of anxiety is in fact an essential key to the understanding of the human condition, and that it should be actively affirmed, confronted, and incorporated into one’s life.



4. Therefore, the experience of anxiety should not be “medicated out of existence,” but instead actively affirmed, confronted, and incorporated into our lives, even if in some extreme cases, medication (or psychotherapy) might still be the best and most effective response.

## **ONE Link:**

1. “*The Concept of Anxiety*”

URL = [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Concept\\_of\\_Anxiety](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Concept_of_Anxiety)

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## 4. “U.K. Moves Toward Making Adults Presumed Organ Donors”

By Richard Pérez-Peña

*The New York Times*, 23 FEBRUARY 2018

URL = <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/23/world/europe/uk-organ-donation.html>



LONDON — Britain took a crucial step on Friday toward making all adults presumed organ donors unless they say otherwise, which would add the country to a growing list of those that have adopted the policy to address a chronic shortage for transplants.

The House of Commons, on a sparsely attended voice vote, gave unanimous approval to send an organ donor bill to committee, where a final version would be created. Though it still could face procedural obstacles, it has the support of a rare alliance of the Conservative government, the leadership of the opposition Labour Party, and the British medical establishment, indicating that chances of passage are good.

“I’ve seldom seen such a unanimous range of support,” said Geoffrey Robinson, the Labour lawmaker who sponsored the bill and who was one of dozens from both major parties who spoke in favor of it on Friday. “This will save lives.”

The change would apply in England. The Scottish Parliament is also considering moving to an opt-out system, while Northern Ireland requires explicit consent. Wales has had presumed consent to organ donation since 2015.

Dozens of countries have “presumed consent” laws, in which people who do not want their organs to be used must take formal steps to opt out of donation. Though some of those rules have been in place for decades, most have been adopted in recent years; an opt-out system took effect in France last year, for example, and the Dutch Parliament approved one this month.

In the United States, to be organ donors, people must fill out forms or join an online registry, or their families must give approval; a few states have considered opt-out bills, but none have adopted them.

A National Health Service organ donor card. Though public opinion surveys show that a vast majority of people in developed countries favor organ donation, far fewer sign up as donors. Credit Clive Gee/Press Association, via Associated Press

Though public opinion surveys show that a vast majority of people in developed countries favor organ donation, far fewer sign up as donors, and thousands of people around the world die every year while waiting for kidneys, hearts, livers, lungs and other tissue to become available.

The [European countries with the highest donation rates](#) — Belgium, Portugal and Spain — have longstanding presumed consent laws. But in some countries, like Sweden, such laws have not produced high donation rates.

In 2008, Gordon Brown, then the prime minister, called for a presumed consent law in Britain, a measure that the [British Medical Association](#) has supported for years. But the plan was doomed by criticism from a government task force and by some religious leaders — in particular, some Orthodox Jewish authorities took the position that standard organ harvesting practices violated Jewish law, which prohibits desecrating the body.

Since then, surveys have shown rising public sentiment in favor of donation, driven partly by highly publicized cases of people who were forced to wait for organs. With the cooperation of rabbinical authorities, Israel has [loosened its restrictions on organ transplants](#).

Last fall, Prime Minister Theresa May said Parliament should change to an opt-out system, and the government has [invited public comment](#) on the issue through March 6.

Several lawmakers from both major parties said on Friday that the success of a new law would depend largely on specifics that had yet to be worked out. Designing the program poorly could backfire, they said, making people distrust the system and increasing the rate of refusals.

Noting Mr. Brown’s experience and the uneven record of the laws in other countries, lawmakers advocated a “soft” system, in which families could refuse donation even if their dead relatives had not opted out. Most countries with opt-out laws have gone that route, but a few, like Austria and Singapore, have “hard” opt outs, in which the family’s wishes can be dismissed.

“There can be no question of the state taking control of organs, and that’s why the ability to opt out is central to this bill, and it has to be made relatively easy,” said Jackie Doyle-Price, a Conservative health minister. “It’s also central to this that the issue of family consent is respected.”

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## ONE Follow-Up:

Is the following argument sound? If so, why? If not, why not?

1. Autonomy is freely-willed choice and action in accordance with self-legislated rational (whether moral or non-moral) principles of an individual’s own choosing.
2. Autonomy is an inherently good thing.
3. People not only *have* their own bodies, but also *inhabit and own* their own bodies.
4. Therefore, people should have autonomy over the use of their own bodies, not only in any present moment when they’re conscious and fully self-conscious, and adequately in control of their own bodies’ movements, but also in the relevant future, even when they’re not conscious or fully self-conscious, or adequately in control of their own bodies—e.g., when they’re asleep, during a seizure, paralyzed, unconscious, etc.
5. Therefore, people should have autonomy over the use of their bodies, not only when they’re alive, but also over their own corpses after they’re dead.
6. Most people have not explicitly expressed any directives about the use of their own bodies when they’re asleep, during a seizure, paralyzed, unconscious, etc.
7. Therefore, political systems with universal presumptive organ donation (aka “opt out” systems), even if they do save the lives of people other than the donor, are rationally unjustified and immoral, because they violate the bodily autonomy of those who haven’t explicitly expressed any directives about organ donation after their own deaths.

**ONE Link:**

1. "The Donation of Human Organs"

URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/organ-donation/>

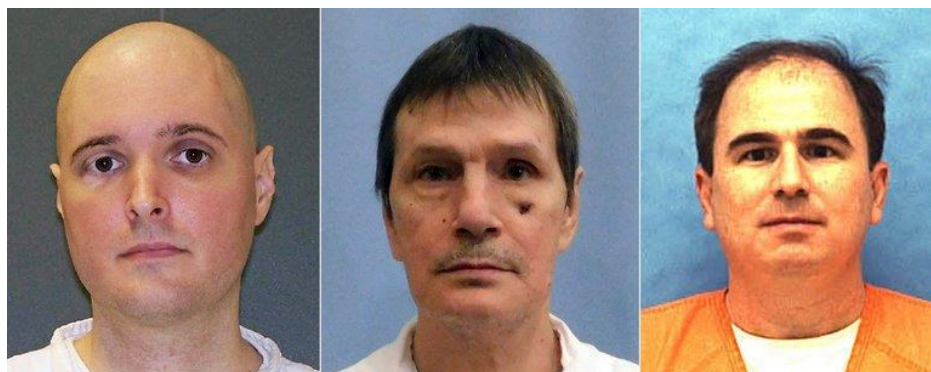
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## 5. “On Execution Day, Three Killers in Different States Meet Different Fates”

By Matthew Haag

The New York Times, 23 FEBRUARY 2018

URL = <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/23/us/thomas-whitaker-execution-alabama-florida.html>



From left, Thomas Whitaker of Texas, Doyle Lee Hamm of Alabama, and Eric Scott Branch of Florida. Credit Associated Press

They were three killers — each set to be executed on Thursday night in different states. But by the end of the day, each had met a different fate.

In Texas, the governor granted a rare death row commutation for Thomas Bartlett Whitaker. Shortly after 6 p.m., after Eric Scott Branch’s last-ditch appeals were denied, Florida put him to death. And in Alabama, the state delayed the execution of Doyle Lee Hamm because medical officials were unable to access a vein before a midnight deadline.

Had all three men been put to death, it would have been the first time in more than eight years that three people had been executed on the same day in the United States.

But less than an hour before Mr. Whitaker’s scheduled execution on Thursday night, Gov. Greg Abbott of Texas spared the man’s life. He accepted the unanimous recommendation of the state’s Board of Pardons to change the death sentence of Mr. Whitaker, who in 2003 orchestrated the killing of his mother and brother near Houston, to life in prison without parole.

The last-minute commutation was the first in a decade in a state that has long led the nation in executions and came after Mr. Whitaker’s father, Kent, who was shot in the attack but survived, led an effort to stop his son’s execution.

“Mr. Whitaker’s father insists that he would be victimized again if the state put to death his last remaining immediate family member,” Mr. Abbott [said in a statement](#), noting that 30 inmates

had been executed during his three years as governor. “Mr. Whitaker must spend the remainder of his life behind bars as punishment for this heinous crime.”

While multiple executions have been scheduled and carried out on the same day before, the unusual flurry on Thursday bucked an overall decline in executions across the country over more than a decade. Twenty-three people were put to death in 2017, a steep decline from 52 in 2009 and 98 in 1999, according to the Death Penalty Information Center in Washington.

Four inmates, including Mr. Branch, have been put to death in 2018.

“We won’t be able to tell from what happens tonight alone whether this is a change in the trend or not,” Robert Dunham, executive director at the Death Penalty Information Center, said in an interview.

But Mr. Dunham noted that the number of executions so far this year and those scheduled in the coming weeks would still be fewer than those during the same time in some previous years. “It will still be consistent of the long-term trend away from the death penalty,” he said.

Texas has played a major part in the decrease in executions throughout the country. Changes in state laws, appeals by death row inmates and fewer capital punishment cases in Texas have contributed to the sharp drop-off. Thirty-five people were executed there in 1999, compared with seven in 2017.

Still, more inmates are executed in Texas than in any other state, underscoring the rarity of the governor’s decision on Thursday night to commute Mr. Whitaker’s death sentence. Mr. Abbott agreed to the Board of Pardons’ unanimous recommendation last week for clemency, another rarity in the state, after Mr. Whitaker’s father pleaded for his son to be spared.

After meeting earlier this month with the board’s members, who were appointed by the governor, the father said that he could not bear to have his son put to death. He said that no other relatives approved of it.

“I am going to be thrown into a deeper grief at the hands of the state of Texas, in the name of justice,” the elder Mr. Whitaker said after the meeting.

The father was shot in the chest during the attack, which his son masterminded and was carried out by the son’s roommate, who was convicted but did not receive the death penalty. In announcing the commutation, Mr. Abbott also noted that the gunman had not been sentenced to death.

After the governor’s decision, Mr. Whitaker said he appreciated that his father’s wishes were granted.

“I’m thankful for this decision, not for me but for my dad,” Mr. Whitaker, 38, said in a statement distributed by prison officials on Thursday night. “Whatever punishment I might have received

or will receive will be just. I deserve any punishment for my crimes, but my dad did nothing wrong.”

Later in the evening, plans to execute Mr. Hamm, 61, were set in motion before his death warrant expired at midnight. But about 30 minutes before that deadline, prison officials called it off.

Jeff Dunn, the commissioner of the Alabama Department of Corrections, said that medical staff members at the prison tried to access a vein on Mr. Hamm after the United States Supreme Court lifted a temporary stay around 8:45 p.m.

“They recommended we not continue simply because we were running out of time,” Mr. Dunn said at a news conference at the Holman Correctional Facility. “I wouldn’t characterize what we had tonight as a problem.”

Mr. Dunn said it would be up to the state attorney general’s office to decide when another execution date could be set.

Lawyers for Mr. Hamm had argued in his appeals that he has terminal cancer and that his condition and prior drug usage would make it difficult for prison officials to find a vein for lethal injection. After the state halted the execution on Thursday night, one of his lawyers, Bernard E. Harcourt, said he believed Mr. Hamm’s health complicated the procedure.

“They probably couldn’t find a vein and had been poking him for two and a half hours,” Mr. Harcourt wrote on Twitter. “Unconscionable. Simply unconscionable.”

Mr. Hamm has been on death row for decades after he killed a motel clerk in Cullman, Ala., in 1987 during a robbery.

Mr. Branch, 47, raped and fatally beat a University of West Florida student in 1993. He was pronounced dead at 6:05 p.m. Thursday, the state said.

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## **ONE Follow-Up:**

Is the following argument sound? If so, why? If not, why not?

1. If one person has murdered another person or persons, then even if legal punishment is justified for the murderer, legally killing the murderer by means of capital punishment will not bring the victims back to life.



2. And even when a criminal is in prison for life for committing some heinous crime, including murder, there is always the chance that some good could come from the continued life of that criminal.

3. Moreover, criminal justice systems in many or even most countries are systematically biased against poor people and people of certain races, ethnicities, and religious beliefs.

4. Therefore, not only is capital punishment is rationally unjustified and immoral in general, but also in death-penalty countries like the USA, that permit commuted death sentences, reprieves, or full pardons by government leaders, it is especially arbitrary, unfair, and morally scandalous that some people on death row should be put to death while others are not.

## **ONE Link:**

1. "Capital Punishment"

URL = <https://www.utm.edu/staff/jfieser/class/160/7-cap-pun.htm>

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