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## **Tickets Are Free**

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This world is filled with an abundance of life, each form as essential as the last, but in this swirling sea of creatures and suns, humanity is the only form that sees this world as artwork. When discussing the fundamentals of human existence, Epictetus marks our separation from “wild beasts,” asserting that we alone are “capable of comprehending the divine administration and of considering the connection of things.” (Epictetus, 68) Using these qualities of intellect, humans are capable of connecting experiences from the natural world into meaningful patterns, allowing us to conceive of things wholly unique and supernatural.

Humanity is sustained by knowledge, resulting in an inherent need to answer incalculable questions just to find stability and adapt to this increasingly unnatural world. Aside from the desire not to face the starkness of mortality entirely blind, gaining knowledge appears to be an undeniable pleasure, a welcomed obsession with searching for a definite purpose. Aristotle, utilizing his affinity for human virtue to further his esteems of this search, stated, “the activity of philosophic wisdom is admittedly the pleasantest of virtuous activities.” (Aristotle, 44) When first coming across these sweeping testimonies for the importance of reaching excellence, I felt that this might be a valuable part of life’s meaning.

My first tentative conception of my purpose was of humans as the world’s historians, existing to compile as much physical and metaphysical knowledge as possible during our species’ slow, but often-volatile crawl through time. I imagined we were meant to “catalog” the universe, and supported this with our exponentially massive collection of data. Each miniscule experience leaving a small imprint on the world, as each breath of polluted air slowly blackens the lungs. Wordless novels on the shelves of our DNA carry on more wisdom with every passing generation. We become more cosmically aware, we comprehend parts of life that were previously unexplored, each revelation bringing us closer to shattering the mirror between perception and reality.

Oppositions to these ideals of constant searching and my historian daydream might come from Eastern philosophies, Taoism for example. The endless complication of life would go against the idea of non-action and unlearning things in an effort to become more centered within the universe and the Tao. On top of this are the insights on the detrimental phenomena of gaining more knowledge and simultaneously more confusion and frustration.

Chuang Tzu makes statements on the balance necessary in man, and on the virtue of, "Leaving Things Alone" as the excerpt's title summarizes. His philosophy greatly differs from those that formed my first ideas of life's possible meanings; he states, "Love of wisdom leads to wise contriving. Love of knowledge leads to faultfinding." (Chuang, 89) Although, it is important to me that he says this of the love of wisdom, and not of being wise.

As I considered more and more the prospect of man's observant and uniquely comprehensive nature I found myself envisioning life, at least our sense perception of life, as the showing of a movie in a theater. A fault of this comparison is the surety that the film will last no more and no less than a few hours, and with its quick end comes quick relief from less than favored concepts. At ten years old we all believe we will live for a century, years later we realize more than the falsity of this, but also how short one hundred years actually is, and how soon we will reach the last scene, before our loved ones roll the credits. My favorite passage that connects to this interest comes from Arthur Schopenhauer's *On the Sufferings of the World*. He addresses the perspective of children when envisioning their life, he explains that, "we are like children in a theatre before the curtain is raised, sitting there in high spirits and eagerly waiting for the play to begin." (Schopenhauer, 101) His outlook on what the curtain opens to is not positive; he sees life as, "a task to be done." You could see life as a task, a prison-like burden, or you could see it as entertainment; a brief interlude between eternities in which the world performs and the tickets are free.

Each scene must arrive in the correct sequence; time is vital, and limited. Regardless of any urge to pause and analyze the meaning of things, the moment you reach a conclusion you are confronted with challenges to that conclusion. This parallels the constantly transitional nature of time; every frame exists to carry you right to the next, every minute pours into the next one. Schopenhauer explained these things eloquently but concisely, saying, "the ever-passing present moment" is the "only mode of actual existence," and we live in a continuous existence of "Becoming without ever Being." (Schopenhauer, 107) If you were to take one short scene from a film with no context, it would most likely mean nothing to you, but when connected to the whole it is the most vital piece. As it can be in life when things happen that seem insignificant and when reflected upon later become enormous events of great personal importance, or moments regretfully passed up in expectation of bluer skies. Again Schopenhauer appears, with a more morose intention, "The scenes of our life are like pictures done in rough mosaic. Looked at close, they produce no effect." (Schopenhauer, 108) He

illuminates the motivation of those dancing into death's arms, those who reach the end of their rope halfway down the cliff side.

One can profess their opinion of a film; they can burst out with laughter or applause, or protest the content and voice distaste. One could claim that nothing happened as it "should have" happened, as if somehow their disapproval will alter the plot. Dissatisfaction changes nothing and serves no purpose but to leave you dissatisfied. A better approach would be to remain unaffected, in control, like a Stoic. One always has the potential to search for redeeming qualities, to leave contended by the participation and not by the fulfillment of an expectation. Realistically speaking, leaving is always an option, but one risks remaining forever unaware of the potential eventualities, the end of the film being nothing but a black screen ripped of any value and of unfortunate scenarios, of any scenarios.

Other than Schopenhauer, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola has in his *Oration on the Dignity of Man*, passages that also lent to my interest in observation as a primary human purpose, and visual arts as a form of this observation. He expresses reverence for man as a being made specifically to appreciate the sheer beauty of the universe. Mirandola's figurative audience finds itself "among the seats of the universe," not to achieve excellence or provoke change but to "contemplate the world." (Mirandola, 74) There is rarely a day that passes in which I am not abruptly stopped by an urge to appreciate the complexity of my surroundings. Mirandola's God would assure those who wonder, "I have placed you at the very center of the world, so that from that vantage point you may with greater ease glance round about you on all that the world contains." (Mirandola, 74) He created a creature capable of seeing the naturally artistic "grandeur" in every aspect of the world. Every pair of eyes trained on an image that cannot be recreated, filled with the understanding of life's continuous flux, the brevity of a sight only adding to the appreciation, the preservation of a sight only serving to commemorate its brilliance.

While I don't consider the meaning of life a relative or personal search, we all constantly seek out concepts that can carry us through this transitional life, full of doubts, and juxtaposed ideals of morality. Like the Buddha's parable of the raft, leaving behind those things that carried you to safety when the time comes, we create rafts out of words, and forget them as we approach the next river. Seeing life as a film mixes several aspects of my favorite philosophies: sitting back and allowing life to happen as it will like a Taoist, always seeking self-improvement as Aristotle did, remaining in control like a Stoic, being realistic, but not entirely pessimistic,

like Schopenhauer, and finding happiness in the art found all throughout existence. Nothing is as validating as putting a philosophical lens over imperative parts of your life and finding meaning there.