

The Good Life

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Introduction and Summary

This article describes my view of what comprises “the good life,” along with some comments on how to achieve it. I begin with a discussion of the views of Bertrand Russell on the topic, and compare my own views to his. I close with some observations on how to achieve the good life. In Russell’s view, “The good life is one inspired by love and guided by knowledge.” In my view, “The good life is inspired by desire, guided by love, and facilitated (enabled) by knowledge.”

Bertrand Russell’s views on the good life

In 1925, British philosopher Bertrand Russell published a small book entitled, *What I Believe*. A reprint of this book is included in the later publication, *Why I Am Not a Christian and other essays on religion and related subjects* (1957, currently published by Touchstone / Simon and Schuster). In a section of the book entitled, “The Good Life,” Russell presents the following definition of the good life: “The good life is one inspired by love and guided by knowledge.” I will present a few quotations from Russell’s essay, and then expand on it, presenting my own point of view on the matter. The quotes that follow are but a taste of Russell’s thoughtful essay – I recommend that you acquire and read the full essay.

From the section entitled, “The Good Life”:

“Knowledge and love are both indefinitely extensible; therefore, however good a life may be, a better life can be imagined.”

“Although both love and knowledge are necessary, love is in a sense more fundamental, since it will lead intelligent people to seek knowledge, in order to find out how to benefit those whom they love. But if people are not intelligent, they will be content to believe what they have been told and may do harm in spite of the most genuine benevolence.”

“Love is a word which covers a variety of feelings; I have used it purposely, as I wish to include them all. Love as an emotion – which is what I am speaking about, for love “on principle” does not seem to me genuine – moves between two poles: on one side, pure delight in contemplation; on the other, pure benevolence. Where inanimate objects are concerned, delight alone enters in; we cannot feel benevolence toward a landscape or a sonata. ... The opposite pole of love is pure benevolence. Men have sacrificed their lives to helping lepers; in such a case the love they felt cannot have had any element of aesthetic delight.

“Love at its fullest is an indissoluble combination of the two elements, delight and well-wishing. The pleasure of a parent in a beautiful and successful child combines both elements; so does sex love at its best. But in sex love, benevolence will only exist where there is secure possession, since otherwise jealousy will destroy it, while perhaps actually increasing the delight in contemplation. Delight without well-wishing may be cruel; well-wishing without delight easily tends to become cold and a little superior.”

“In a perfect world, every sentient being would be to every other the object of the fullest love, compounded of delight, benevolence, and understanding inextricably blended. It does not follow that, in this actual world, we ought to attempt to have such feelings toward all the sentient beings whom we encounter. There are many in whom we cannot feel delight, because they are disgusting; if we were to do violence to our nature by trying to see beauties in them, we should merely blunt our susceptibilities to what we naturally find beautiful. Not to mention human beings, there are fleas and bugs and lice.”

“Benevolence is easier to extend widely, but even benevolence has its limits. If a man wished to marry a lady, we should not think the better of him for withdrawing if he found that someone else also wished to marry her: we should regard this as a fair field for competition. Yet his feelings toward a rival cannot be *wholly* benevolent. I think that in all descriptions of the good life here on earth we must assume a certain basis of animal vitality and animal instinct; without this, life becomes tame and uninteresting. Civilization should be something added to this, not substituted for it; the ascetic saint and the detached sage fail in this respect to be complete human beings. A small number of them may enrich a community; but a world composed of them would die of boredom.”

“These considerations lead to a certain emphasis on the element of delight as an ingredient in the best love. Delight, in this actual world, is unavoidably selective and prevents us from having the same feelings for all mankind. When conflicts arise between delight and benevolence, they must, as a rule, be decided by a compromise, not by a complete surrender of either. Instinct has its rights, and if we do violence to it beyond a point it takes vengeance in subtle ways. Therefore in aiming at a good life the limits of human possibility must be borne in mind. Here again, however, we are brought back to the necessity of knowledge.”

“When I speak of knowledge as an ingredient of the good life, I am not thinking of ethical knowledge but of scientific knowledge and knowledge of particular facts. I do not think there is, strictly speaking, such a thing as ethical knowledge. If we desire to achieve some end, knowledge may show us the means, and this knowledge may loosely pass as ethical. But I do not believe that we can decide what sort of conduct is right or wrong except by reference to its probable consequences. [My note: This is the basis for Neale Donald Walsch’s relative morality.] Given an end to be achieved, it is a question for science to discover how to achieve it. All moral rules must be tested by examining whether they tend to realize ends that we desire. I say ends that we desire, not ends that we *ought* to desire. What we “ought” to desire is merely what someone else wishes us to desire. Usually it is what the authorities wish us to desire – parents, schoolmasters, policemen, and judges.”

“The superfluity of theoretical ethics is obvious in simple cases. Suppose, for instance, your child is ill. Love makes you wish to cure it, and science tells you how to do so. There is not an intermediate stage of ethical theory, where it is demonstrated that your child had better be cured. Your act springs directly from desire for an end, together with knowledge of means. This is equally true of all acts, whether good or bad. The ends differ, and the knowledge is more adequate in some cases than in others. But there is no conceivable way of making people do things they do not wish to do. What is possible is to alter their desires by a system of rewards and penalties, among which social approval and disapproval are not the least potent. The question for the legislative moralist is, therefore: How shall this system of rewards and punishments be arranged so as to secure the maximum of what is desired by the legislative authority? If I say that the legislative authority has bad desires, I mean merely that its desires conflict with those of some section of the community to which I belong. Outside human desires there is no moral standard.”

In the section entitled, "Moral Rules," Russell continues:

"The practical need of morals arises from the conflict of desires, whether of different people or of the same person at different times or even at one time. A man desires to drink, and also be fit for his work next morning."

"That is why love is better than hate, because it brings harmony instead of conflict into the desires of the persons connected. Two people between whom there is love succeed or fail together, but when two people hate each other the success of either is the failure of the other."

"If we were right in saying that the good life is inspired by love and guided by knowledge, it is clear that the moral code of any community is not ultimate and self-sufficient but must be examined with a view to seeing whether it is such as wisdom and benevolence would have decreed. Moral codes have not always been faultless. The Aztecs considered it their painful duty to eat human flesh for fear the light of the sun should grow dim. They erred in their science; and perhaps they would have perceived the scientific error if they had had any love for the sacrificial victims."

"Current morality is a curious blend of utilitarianism and superstition, but the superstitious part has the stronger hold, as is natural, since superstition is the origin of moral rules."

"Even more harmful than theological superstition is the superstition of nationalism, of duty to one's own state and to no other. But I do not propose on this occasion to discuss the matter beyond pointing out that limitation to one's compatriots is contrary to the principle of love which we recognized as constituting the good life. It is also, of course, contrary to enlightened self-interest, since an exclusive nationalism does not pay even the victorious nations."

In the section, "Salvation: Individual and Social," Russell writes:

"When Plato wanted to describe the good life, he described a whole community, not an individual; he did so in order to define justice, which is an essentially social conception. He was accustomed to citizenship of a Republic, and political responsibility was something which he took for granted."

"The good life, as we conceive it, demands a multitude of social conditions and cannot be realized without them. The good life, we said, is a life inspired by love and guided by knowledge. The knowledge required can only exist where governments or millionaires devote themselves to its discovery and diffusion."

"To live a good life in the fullest sense a man must have a good education, friends, love, children (if he desires them), a sufficient income to keep him from want and grave anxiety, good health, and work which is not uninteresting. All these things, in varying degrees, depend upon the community and are helped or hindered by political events. The good life must be lived in a good society and is not fully possible otherwise."

"I do not wish to suggest that revolutions are never necessary, but I do wish to suggest that they are not short cuts to the millennium. There is no short cut to the good life, whether individual or social. To build up the good life, we must build up intelligence, self-control, and sympathy."

In the section, "Science and Happiness," Russell writes:

“The purpose of the moralist is to improve men’s behavior. This is a laudable ambition, since their behavior is for the most part deplorable.”

“It must, therefore, be one of the chief concerns of the scientific moralist to combat fear. This can be done in two ways: by increasing security and by cultivating courage.”

“But courage in fighting is by no means the only form, nor perhaps even the most important. There is courage in facing poverty, courage in facing decision, courage in facing the hostility of one’s own herd. In these, the bravest soldiers are often lamentably deficient. And above all there is the courage to think calmly and rationally in the face of danger, and to control the impulse of panic fear or panic rage. These are certainly things which education can help to give. And the teaching of every form of courage is rendered easier by good health, good physique, adequate nourishment, and free play for fundamental vital impulses.”

“But fear is not the only source of malevolence; envy and disappointment also have their share. The envy of cripples and hunchbacks is proverbial as a source of their malignity, but other misfortunes than theirs produce similar results. A man or woman who has been thwarted sexually is apt to be full of envy; this generally takes the form of moral condemnation of the more fortunate. Much of the driving force of revolutionary movements is due to envy of the rich. Jealousy is, of course, a special form of envy; envy of love. The old often envy the young; when they do, they are apt to treat them cruelly.”

“A certain amount of work is not a thing to complain of; indeed, in nine cases out of ten, it makes a man happier than complete idleness. But the amount and kind of work that most people have to do at present is a grave evil: especially bad is the lifelong bondage to routine. Life should not be too closely regulated or too methodical; our impulses, when not positively destructive or injurious to others, ought if possible to have free play; there should be room for adventure. Human nature we should respect, because our impulses and desires are the stuff out of which our happiness is to be made. It is no use to give men something abstractedly considered ‘good’; we must give them something desired or needed if we are to add to their happiness.”

“Nature, even human nature, will cease more and more to be an absolute datum; more and more it will become what scientific manipulation has made it. Science can, if it chooses, enable our grandchildren to live the good life, by giving them knowledge, self-control, and characters productive of harmony rather than strife. At present it is teaching them to kill each other, because many men of science are willing to sacrifice the future of mankind to their own momentary prosperity. But this phase will soon pass when men have acquired the same domination over their own passions that they already have over the physical forces of the external world. Then at last we shall have won our freedom.”

So much for Bertrand Russell’s views on the good life.

My views on the good life

In my view, the good life is inspired by desire, guided by love, and facilitated (enabled) by knowledge. In the paragraphs that follow, I shall explain the reasons for my different definition.

First, in order to achieve a good life, we must focus on a goal, and realize the achievement of goals that we set for ourselves. Human beings are greater – more complex – than the animals. They are not simply driven by the need for food and shelter, or the emotions of sex and fear.

Intelligent beings need far more to make life fulfilling and meaningful. Human beings have strong desires for excitement, adventure, discovery, creativity, building, entertainment and playing games. And their goals are not simply defined by instinct – human beings have the freedom to set their own goals.

What makes human activity – the game of life – particularly interesting is that man has “knowledge of good and evil.” It is the presence of evil in the world that makes human existence and activity so very interesting and meaningful. Without evil, life would have no “plots.” I recall once reading a book on how to write a novel, and one of the maxims was something to the effect that the story’s not begun until the plot is developed. That is true not only in novels, but in life as well.

Russell’s paradigm for the good life is basically sound, but it does not go far enough. It could apply just as well to animals – a mother lion, out of love (maternal instinct) teaches its cubs how to hunt (i.e., provides them with knowledge of skills and environment, which they in turn use to survive). And the lions, as a family (pride) and as a species, realize a good life. Russell states that the good life is inspired by love. And, to a considerable extent, it is. Our love for our mate and our children is a major aspect of human existence. But, as human beings, with high intelligence and a wide range of emotions, love for family members is but one of many other significant aspects of existence. Columbus had a burning desire to find a new route to India, across the Atlantic Ocean. This desire had nothing to do with love as Russell defined it (delight and benevolence). And Thomas Edison had a burning desire to invent an electric light bulb. This had nothing at all to do with his love of his family members. Tiger Woods has a burning desire to be the best golfer in the world, and this had virtually nothing to do with love for a mate or children or parents or anyone else. Bill Gates had a burning desire to build an operating system that would be used by all of the world’s microcomputers. This had nothing to do with love (i.e., it did not affect his love for others, or was affected by their love for him). Werner von Braun had a burning desire to build a rocket that would reach the moon, and Albert Einstein had a burning desire to understand why the speed of light was a universal constant. Many writers write and musicians play, with little relationship to love (consideration of love for others). And many people play games (e.g., cards, chess, football) that have little or no relationship to love for others. The point is, much of what people do has little to do with love, and much to do with other emotions, such as the gratification of discovery or conquest. Love for others was a negligible consideration in determining whether the preceding inventors, scientists, engineers and others should have worked on what they did, or on something else (or the way that they did, or in some other way).

That is, unless it is argued that engaging in risky behavior might rob a man’s family of his companionship or support, or that any technical development is bad, since it contributes to the development of an industrial society that is harmful to nature and, ultimately, to man. What does love have to say about these considerations?

Note that in the above examples, I have deliberately omitted life activities that may well be guided by love. Alexander the Great and Julius Caesar had burning desires to conquer the world. Should they have done so? Their conquests resulted in the slaughter and submission of countless multitudes of people. Was this right to do so? Were the advantages of advancing civilization and making life on Earth much more complex and interesting worth the sacrifice of the unfortunate souls whose lives got disrupted and destroyed? Their conquests were not necessary. Or were they? Had they not acted first (a “preemptive” strike), would the Persians or the Egyptians or the Gauls have eventually struck first, as human population inexorably expanded? I believe so. But whether love has anything to say in the matter of *whether* to

conquer the world, it may have much to say on *how* it is done. Execution of a sentry who falls asleep on the job may seem extreme punishment from our present-day perspective, but it is a very necessary procedure when the lives of all of your troops are dependent on vigilance, and there are no prisons.

I could present many other examples in which love plays a significant role. Dale Earnhardt wanted to be the world's fastest stock-car driver, to the point where it cost him his life. Was this fair to his wife and family? Should his love for them, and their love for him, dissuaded him from undertaking this role? Would they have been happier living with a live dad who lived a life of frustration and regret, forever aware of his burning desire to be the world's greatest racing driver, knowing inside that he had a good chance to do so, forever wondering whether he could make it, eaten by jealousy as he watched lesser men grasp the prize, and knowing that he himself had diminished his life by turning away from his intended destiny of a life of interest, challenge, excitement, achievement, pride – and the ultimate tragedy? The answer is obvious.

Love does not imply minimization of risk – it implies balancing risk with goals. Love works for rich, full lives. In the end, we shall all die. The only issues of importance relative to death are when and under what circumstances. In this regard, it may be helpful to recall Jesus' assertions, "I am come that you may have life, and have it more abundantly," and "Whosoever who would save his life will lose it." Jesus' philosophy of life centered on love (love one another, love your neighbor as yourself, love God), but love was intended to enrich the quality of life, not diminish it or constrain it. Love expands life, it does not diminish it. But it may shorten it. In the world of investments, higher return is always associated with higher risk. Life is the same. If you go for the larger prize, you may end up in a wheelchair, or dead sooner rather than later. In life, there is often a tradeoff between quantity and quality. If you shrink from the fear of rejection or loss of a lover or mate, or from the pain of a lost child, you must resign yourself to never having a lover, a mate or children. If you undertake to start a business, you know that you may succeed and become rich and powerful, or at least realize a desired level of control over your life; or you may fail and face a lifetime of debt. But you know that *some* who try will succeed, and *none* who do not will. The choice is yours, to take the chance or not. Love will not let you waste your life, throw your life away with no purpose. But it will never agree to a meaningless, purposeless life. *The ultimate sin is boredom.*

Finally, what about the issue that technological advancement of any kind is, ultimately, detrimental to nature? Should we not, therefore, desist from advancing knowledge and developing the world in any way? In my view, this is not an issue that the individual can address very well. Such issues, dealing with the macroscopic state of the world, rest in the domain of enlightened individuals who are world leaders. The individual, in my view, should not or cannot worry too much about the effect of his actions on the entire world, except when faced with the decision of whether to resist or follow the proposals of the leaders. Mankind cannot engage in the tremendously exciting game of conquering and developing a planet, without harming nature to some extent. But it was God's decision to endow man with an incredible urge to create and build, and it therefore follows that *some* disruption of nonsentient nature will follow. All life forms occupy space and resources that could be used by other life forms – that is not the issue. The issue is whether all life forms live together in a reasonably stable harmony, without one species trying to destroy all of the others.

(Aside, on the issue of the role, scope, and scale of technology in mankind's future... In the current phase of Earth's / mankind's life cycle, the game is economic development. In this phase, free-market capitalism, democracy, massive amounts of commercial energy, and individual freedom reign. This combination has never been seen before, and will never be seen

again on this planet. The significant game to play at the present time is accumulation, by individuals, of vast riches and power. The incredible situation at the present time is that virtually anyone can play and win. This phase, however, can last only for a very short time (until fossil fuels are gone, or until the planet's biosphere is destroyed). The winners in this game are businessmen, capitalists, technologists and industrialists: the Andrew Carnegies, the J. P. Morgans, the John D. Rockefellers, the Henry Fords, the J. P. Gettys, the Howard Hugheses, the Bill Gateses, the Larry Ellisons, the Warren Buffets, the Donald Trumps, the Sam Waltons, the Richard Bransons and the Jim Goodnights of the world. Mankind will never be able to play this game again. It is the unique opportunity of our time. In the planet's current phase, which is rapidly drawing to an end, the game of the time is economic development, and it is the men who end their lives with the most marbles who win. The play of this game, however, is destroying the biosphere, and when these men are finished playing, there may be nothing but a ruined planet for all of the millions of future generations of mankind, if mankind survives at all. And this leads to an even more fascinating game – the game to save the planet, and mankind, from those who would destroy it by overpopulation and global industrialization. That is the game that I see myself playing.

(The games of these individuals are quickly losing relevance. Just as the games that Alexander and Caesar and Charlemagne played are no longer relevant, and are now a forever-gone part of the past, their games will soon no longer be played. The games of industrial and business successes are becoming irrelevant because the system (abundant fossil fuels, democracy, capitalism, individual freedom, materialism, hedonism, global industrialization, overpopulation, etc.) in which they could operate is passing. It is fascinating to observe that, while their games were *the* game of Earth's recent phase, continued play of those games will surely destroy the biosphere and exterminate mankind. Too much of a good thing. Those who were the leaders and creators and builders of the recent era are now the destroyers. Thesis and antithesis. What was once the good and the goal has been transformed into the evil and the anti-goal. Capitalism has indeed sown the seeds of its own destruction. The new system, the New Age, the phoenix, will arise out of the ashes of the system that is about to pass away. But, if we succeed at all, and avoid our extinction, it will not at all be a return to nature as the planet once knew it. Change continues. Complexity advances. You can't go home again. There will never be a return to a natural world (assuming mankind survives), now that man has eaten of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and Pandora's box has been opened. The revolutionary change that is about to occur is the transformation of the global-industrial world into a hybrid world, in which technology and nature will exist in harmony. *Thesis*: the natural world of yesteryear, which is gone forever as long as mankind survives. *Antithesis*: the globally industrialized world of today, which is rapidly self-destructing. *Synthesis*: The New World Order will combine elements of the old (natural world) and the new (technology). It is in this new system – the synthesis stage – that mankind will now move on to greater heights.

(Global industrialization has served its purpose, in enabling the rapid advance (explosion) of knowledge, while at the same time revealing, unequivocally demonstrating, the impossibility of its continuation as a viable long-term planetary system. Mankind has proved beyond a shadow of a doubt that it is incapable of controlling nature. The best that it can do – the *only* way that will work – is to restrict the scale of its operations so that most of the planet can operate as a natural system the way it did for millions of years. What is destroying the biosphere is mankind's large numbers and industrial activity. But mankind is totally incapable of controlling its numbers – it continually seeks new ways to convert the entire planet to agriculture for human food, even to the limit of destroying the very biosphere in which it lives. It seeks to use technology (high-yield varieties, genetic modification, fossil-fuel-based agriculture) to grow more food, to expand human population as rapidly as human females can reproduce, even at the cost

of exterminating tens of thousands of other species every year. Its response to famine is always to grow more food, rather than to allow less people. As the fossil-fuel age draws to a close, however, mankind's numbers will shrink, and it will move to the new phase, with a very small technological population and most of the Earth in a natural state with the primitive (hunter-gatherer, nonagricultural) population that existed on the planet for millions of years.)

With respect to the importance of knowledge, I am in agreement with Russell in viewing that it is an essential ingredient in the recipe for achieving the goal of realizing a good life.

With respect to the role of love in achieving the good life, my view is that, while love may in fact serve as inspiration in some cases, it serves the role of conscience or morality (i.e., a guide) in all cases. We may have desires for many things (such as crossing the ocean or inventing the phonograph or electric light bulb), and whether we strive to achieve those goals and how we go about achieving them, should be guided by the impact that our actions will have on other life forms (not just people, but animals and all other living species that comprise the biosphere). My view is hence that we should, in striving for the good life, be *guided* by love. We may in fact also be *inspired* by love, if our desire is to acquire a mate or help our family or others. In this case, we are both inspired by love and guided by love. But in many cases, our activities have little to do, directly, with love. In these cases, we should take into account the results of our activity on the well-being of others (i.e., take love into account, as a guide). The inspiration may or may not involve love, but love will serve to guide our decisions and actions.

Russell had much to say on the topics of love and knowledge, and there is little that I can add to his discussion of those topics. Since I have added a third ingredient to the good life – viz., desire, I shall discuss it at some length. Also, Russell had little to say on the issue of how to *achieve* the good life, and I will discuss that, also.

Before proceeding with further discussion, I will dwell a little longer on the conceptual framework, or paradigm, with which I am dealing. As I mentioned, I believe that the purpose of life is to achieve whatever goals we wish to set for ourselves, i.e., to express our human nature in as interesting and exciting and full a fashion as we can. But this view immediately raises the question of what those goals should be. In my view, they may be anything at all. Our goals will flow from our desires. All of us have some basic desires, such as for food, shelter, and sex. Beyond these basic desires, different people will have different desires, and hence different goals. On both the individual level and the societal level, we should, if we are striving for “the good life,” consider the impact of realizing our desires on other people and the planetary environment, i.e., be guided by love. Of course, given human nature, some people will not be guided by love at all. In fact, whole societies may not be guided by love – witness the current destruction of the planetary environment – and the likely extinction of all future generations of mankind – by the whole of Western (industrialized) civilization, guided by materialistic greed, not by love.

But if you are striving for the good life, what should your goals be? That is, what should your desires be? To some extent, you have little control over your basic desires (food, shelter, sex, social acceptance / recognition). The issue here concerns desires beyond the basic ones. While those additional desires may seem to arise spontaneously, given the society and environment into which we are born, in fact we have considerable flexibility in generating them. Look around you, at all that life has to offer, and imagine the infinite variety of roles that you might play. As Shakespeare observed, the world is a stage, and we are all players on that stage. To a very large degree, you can write your own script. Of course, if you are living in ancient Rome, you may as well not aspire to be Buck Rogers in the Twenty-First Century, and if

you aspire to be Caesar, the odds against your accomplishing that goal are quite low (given the competition for the job). But, if you are of sound mind and body, you have a very good chance of accomplishing almost any reasonable goal you set for yourself, in the social and environmental context in which you find yourself. What do you want out of life? That is pretty much up to you.

If you are striving for the good life (as we have defined it), your goals, and your desires, and what you do to achieve them, will be guided by love. That is, what goals we decide to strive for, and how we work toward them, should be guided by love. To accomplish this, it is necessary to assess the importance of our proposed actions on other people and the environment – not just in our immediate time and place, but for the entire planet and for all time. The effect of this guidance will differ for each of us. We are not all able to change the world, either because we have no desire to do so, or because of other limitations. Our goals and the actions that we consider to achieve them will be different. In order to be guided by love, we must be able to imagine the likely consequences of our actions. Some of us are much better at seeing the implications of our actions than others. Most of us are reasonably able to imagine the impact of our actions on our immediate family or social context in the present or near-term future. The big problem is that what we do may seem reasonable in a local context in the near future, but not work well in a global context or in the distant future. It may seem perfectly reasonable to want to have a car to commute to work in, but if all six billion people on the planet were to do this, the planet would surely be destroyed. So what do you do?

The best approach here is to realize that what you do, as a single individual, will probably not change the world, and to act responsibly (be guided by love) given the social and environmental context in which you live. You may try to act responsibly as an individual, and observe the maxim, “Think globally and act locally.” But realistically, most individuals will have little impact on global developments. Their collective action may appear to make a difference, such as in voting in a national election or serving as a soldier in the army or participating in a world religion. But if none of the people for whom you are voting has a good program (such as is the case in the current (2004) US presidential election, with respect to the establishment of a rational planetary management system), all the democracy and all the voting and all of the individual action in the world will not amount to anything. It is the will of the national or planetary leaders that will make the difference. It is the inspiration and leadership of enlightened individuals that will make a difference. And these individuals will appear when the time is right. For the average individual, there are many other local activities (job, family, hobbies) that provide real meaning to his life, and fill it on a daily basis. For most people, a better maxim than “Think globally and act locally,” is probably, “Think locally and act locally.” It will be very clear when a world leader appears who can make a difference, and when that happens, the local actions of individuals who support him will contribute to success.

If society as a whole is not headed in the right direction, then a social or natural catastrophe, such as a war or revolution, or global warming, will occur, and you will have little effect on preventing this or affecting the ultimate outcome. If you think that you can change the world, then by all means go for it, but realize that you will probably not realize your goal. As a human being, you must decide for yourself if you would rather succeed at raising a family and becoming a schoolteacher and mayor of your town, or fail at preventing global warming. So choose goals for yourself that will be exciting to accomplish and have a reasonably good chance of success. As an individual, do not worry too much about the big picture. That is the responsibility of the planetary leaders. Remind yourself that, as asserted in Ecclesiastes, nothing is very important – nothing really matters very much. Remind yourself of Jesus’ assertion that he came so that we may have life, and have it more abundantly. As an individual,

you cannot control the planet's future. But you can ensure that your life is meaningful and interesting and exciting, in a personal and local context.

Assuming that you have chosen a goal, how do you go about realizing it? There have been thousands of self-help and motivational books written on this subject. One of the best is *Think and Grow Rich*, written in 1937 by Napoleon Hill (and still in print). Hill identifies the following major components to achieving an objective: (1) desire; (2) faith / visualization; (3) autosuggestion; (4) specialized knowledge; (5) imagination / creativity; (6) organized planning; (7) decision / action; (8) persistence; (9) power of the "Master Mind" (coordination of knowledge among two or more people); (10) the mystery of sex transmutation; (11) the subconscious mind; (12) the brain; (13) the sixth sense; (14) banishment of the six basic fears of poverty, criticism, ill health, loss of love of someone, old age, and death.

You will notice that the very first item listed by Hill is desire. Without a desire to achieve a goal, you will never achieve it. With respect selecting and nurturing desire, a number of observations may be made. First, make use of meditation and/or prayer to help identify what goal is best for you. Synthesize as many options as you can, and evaluate each of them with respect to criteria that are important to you (remember to use love as a guide). Collect information that will enable you to make a comprehensive and sound evaluation of all of the alternatives (consider things like cost, special skill requirements, match of requirements to your interests and abilities). Conduct a SWOT analysis of the options (analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats associated with each option). Before you go to sleep, visualize the alternatives, and suggest to yourself that you will consider the alternatives as you sleep and reach a good decision about which to adopt by morning. (Remember the old saying that we learn to skate in the summer and we learn to swim in the winter.) Follow your heart. If you can, discuss the options with others whose judgment you respect – but not with anyone who is "negative" or pessimistic or a failure. Think about the alternatives as much as you can – remember the maxims, "what you think, you become," and "what you fear, you attract."

The second item in Hill's list is faith, which Hill defines as visualization of, and belief in attainment of desire. There is a difference between "thinking" you can accomplish something, and "believing" that you can. Before you set out on a mission, ask yourself whether you believe that it is right for you and that you can accomplish it. To succeed, you must believe. As Napoleon Hill asserted, "What the mind of man can conceive and believe it can achieve." Belief – faith – is incredibly important. As the famous motivational speaker Zig Ziglar repeatedly says, "Do you believe, do you really believe?" In the September 20 issue of *Time* magazine, there is a column by Joe Klein entitled, "All You Have to Do is Believe." In speaking about the 2004 US presidential campaign, Klein points out that the major difference between the campaign performance of John Kerry and George Bush, and the reason why Kerry makes limited progress in attacking Bush's record, is that George Bush "seems to believe what he says and Kerry doesn't quite." George Bush "truly believes in the power of 'freedom' and the evil of Islamic radicalism." "Bush seems to believe what he says, even if it doesn't always match reality."

Some additional information from *Think and Grow Rich* is presented in an appendix at the end of this piece.

A simple framework for success

I mentioned that Russell did not dwell on the mechanics of achieving the good life. Above, I suggested consulting Napoleon Hill's book as a guide to accomplishing your goals. As a simplified paradigm for achieving the goal of realizing the good life, I would suggest the

following. The paradigm consists of three areas (categories of activity), called Desire, Knowledge and Action. These three areas may be called the three “Pillars of Success.” If you focus on a goal which you strongly desire and which you strongly believe you can accomplish, and do diligent work within each of these areas, you will likely accomplish your goal.

The Desire area includes work on emotional aspects. This includes using meditation and prayer as tools to help select a preferred goal. It includes visualization, creativity, autosuggestion, and intuition. It includes taking steps to banish the fears that jeopardize success.

The Knowledge area includes work in intellectual aspects. This area includes assembling information about potential alternative goals, and about the advantages and disadvantages (criteria values) of each of them. It includes obtaining specialized knowledge or skills required to accomplish your goal with high likelihood. It includes acquiring knowledge about motivation and personal development techniques that you may take advantage of, such as meditation, autosuggestion, and public speaking. It includes use of the “Master Mind” (working with two or more other people on your goal). It includes developing a detailed plan for accomplishing your objectives.

The most important part of the Knowledge area is assessing the likely outcome of alternative courses of action. Whether an action contributes to the good life depends on whether it is helpful to other people and other life forms. If it is harmful to people or the biosphere, it does not contribute to the good life. This assessment is very difficult, since in today’s industrial world, about all human activity is destructive to the environment, and hence to future generations of mankind and other species. At an earlier time, the destruction of human activity could easily be repaired by the biosphere. Now, human activity is on such a massive scale that it is impossible for nature to repair the damage, no matter how environmentally minded we may be as individuals. The biospheric system is in the process of massive and irreversible change.

The Action area includes work in the decision and implementation aspects. It includes making a plan, making a decision to proceed with your plan, and undertaking the actions required to implement it. Although “Action” refers mainly to the activities subsequent to those of the Desire and Knowledge areas, it is obvious that action is involved in both the Desire and Knowledge areas (in performing Desire activities such as visualization and autosuggestion and Knowledge activities such as assembling information on personal development methodologies and the specialized knowledge and skills that achievement of your goal may require (e.g., accounting, computer skills, language skills, a college degree)).

It is emphasized that an essential ingredient of each of the three areas is work. Without work on focusing and nurturing desire, on acquiring necessary knowledge and skills, and on developing and implementing an Action plan, little of significance will result.

Appendix: Some Additional Items from Napoleon Hill’s *Think and Grow Rich*

This appendix presents a number of quotations from Napoleon Hill’s *Think and Grow Rich*. The book is a treasure house of amplification of the points presented below, containing many examples and anecdotes. They are intended to “whet your appetite” to acquire and read the complete book. Although Hill’s book is oriented toward the accumulation of financial wealth, the principles espoused in it may be applied to accomplish any goal. The book is very famous, and can be found in almost any bookstore.

Chapter I, Thoughts Are Things

Truly, “thoughts are things,” and powerful things at that, when they are mixed with definiteness of purpose, persistence, and a burning desire for their translation into riches, or other material objects.

Chapter II, Desire: The starting point of all achievement; the first step toward riches

Whatever the mind of man can conceive and believe, it can achieve.

Determine what you intend to give in return for what you desire.

“I bargained with Life for a penny,
And Life would pay no more,
However I begged at evening
When I counted my scanty store.

“For Life is a just employer,
He gives you what you ask,
But once you have set the wages,
Why, you must bear the task.

“I worked for a menial’s hire,
Only to learn, dismayed,
That any wage I had asked of Life,
Life would have willingly paid.”

Chapter III, Faith: Visualization of, and belief in attainment of desire; the second step toward riches

There are no limitations to the mind except those we acknowledge.

Both poverty and riches are the offspring of thought.

Faith is a State of Mind Which May Be Induced by Autosuggestion

All down the ages, the religionists have admonished struggling humanity to “have faith” in this, that, and the other dogma or creed, but they have failed to tell people *how* to have faith. They have not stated that “faith is a state of mind that may be induced by self-suggestion.

Chapter IV, Autosuggestion: The medium for influencing the subconscious mind; the third step toward riches

Autosuggestion is self-suggestion.

The subconscious mind takes any orders given it in the spirit of absolute faith, and acts upon those orders, although the orders often have to be presented *over and over again*, through repetition.

Chapter V, Specialized Knowledge: Personal experiences or observations; the fourth step toward riches.

Every adversity, every failure and every heartache carries with it the seed of an equivalent or greater benefit.

There are two kinds of knowledge. One is general, the other is specialized. General knowledge, no matter how great in quantity or variety it may be, is of but little use in the accumulation of money. The faculties of the great universities possess, in the aggregate, practically every form of general knowledge known to civilization. *Most of the professors have but little money.* They specialize on *teaching* knowledge, but they do not specialize on the organization, the use of knowledge.

Knowledge will not attract money, unless it is organized, and intelligently directed, through practical *plans of action*, to the definite end of accumulation of money. Lack of understanding of this fact has been the source of confusion to millions of people who falsely believe that "knowledge is power." It is nothing of the sort! Knowledge is only *potential* power. It becomes power only when, and if, it is organized into definite plans of action and directed to a definite end.

The "missing link" in all systems of education may be found in the failure of educational institutions to teach their students how to organize and use knowledge after they acquire it.

Chapter VI, Imagination: The workshop of the mind; the fifth step toward riches

The imaginative faculty functions in two forms. One is known as "synthetic imagination," and the other as "creative imagination."

Synthetic Imagination: Through this faculty, one may arrange old concepts, ideas, or plans into new combinations. This faculty *creates* nothing. It merely works with the material of experienced, education, and observation with which it is fed. It is the faculty used most by the inventor, with the exception of the "genius" who draws upon the creative imagination, when he cannot solve his problem through synthetic imagination.

Creative Imagination: Through the faculty of creative imagination, the finite mind of man has direct communication with Infinite Intelligence. It is the faculty through which "hunches" and "inspirations" are received. It is by this faculty that all basic, or new ideas are handed over to man. It is through this faculty that one individual may "tune in," or communicate with the subconscious minds of other men.

The creative imagination works automatically, in the manner described in subsequent pages. This faculty functions only when the conscious mind is working at an exceedingly rapid rate, as for example, when the conscious mind is stimulated through the emotion of a *strong desire*.

The creative faculty becomes more alert in proportion to its development through use.

The great leaders of business, industry, finance, and the great artists, musicians, poets, and writers became great, because they developed the faculty of creative imagination.

Chapter VII, Organized Planning: The crystallization of desire into action; the sixth step toward riches

Ally yourself with a group of as many people as you may need for the creation and carrying out of your plan or plans for the accumulation of money – making use of the “Master Mind” principle described in a later chapter.

Keep in mind these facts:

First: you are engaged in an undertaking of major importance to you. To be sure of success, you must have plans which are faultless.

Second: you must have the advantage of the experience, education, native ability and imagination of other minds. This is in harmony with the methods followed by every person who has ever accumulated a great fortune.

No individual has sufficient experience, education, native ability, and knowledge to insure the accumulation of a great fortune, without the cooperation of other people. Every plan you adopt, in your endeavor to accumulate wealth, should be the joint creation of yourself and every other member of your “Master Mind” group. You may originate your own plans, either in whole or in part, but see that those plans are checked, and approved by the members of your “Master Mind” alliance.

If the first plan which you adopt does not work successfully, replace it with a new plan; if this new plan fails to work, replace it with still another, and so on, until you find a plan which does work. Right here is the point at which the majority of men meet with failure, because of their lack of persistence in creating new plans to take the place of those which fail.

The Major Attributes of Leadership:

- Unwavering courage
- Self-control
- A keen sense of justice
- Definiteness of decision
- Definiteness of plans
- The habit of doing more than paid for
- A pleasing personality
- Sympathy and understanding
- Mastery of detail
- Willingness to assume full responsibility
- Cooperation

There are two forms of leadership. The first, and by far the most effective, is leadership by consent of, and with the sympathy of the followers. The second is leadership by force, without the consent and sympathy of the followers.

History is filled with evidences that leadership by force cannot endure. The downfall and disappearance of dictators and kings is significant. It means that people will not follow forced leadership indefinitely.

The Ten Major Causes of Failure in Leadership:

- Inability to organize details
- Unwillingness to render humble service
- Expectation of pay for what they “know” instead of what they do with what they know
- Fear of competition from followers

Lack of imagination
Selfishness
Intemperance
Disloyalty
Emphasis of the “authority” of leadership
Emphasis of title

The Thirty-One Major Causes of Failure:

Unfavorable hereditary background
Lack of a well-defined purpose in life
Lack of ambition to aim above mediocrity
Insufficient education
Lack of self-discipline
Ill health
Unfavorable environmental influences during childhood
Procrastination
Lack of persistence
Negative personality
Lack of controlled sexual urge
Uncontrolled desire for “something for nothing”
Lack of a well defined power of decision
One or more of the six basic fears (described in a later chapter)
Wrong selection of a mate in marriage
Over-caution
Wrong selection of associates in business
Superstition and prejudice
Wrong selection of a vocation
Lack of concentration of effort
The habit of indiscriminate spending
Lack of enthusiasm
Intolerance
Intemperance
Inability to cooperate with others
Possession of power that was not acquired through self effort
Intentional dishonesty
Egotism and vanity
Guessing instead of thinking
Lack of capital
Any particular cause of failure from which you have suffered that has not been included in the foregoing list

Chapter VIII, Decision: The Mastery of Procrastination; the seventh step toward riches

Analysis of over 25,000 men and women who had experienced failure disclosed the fact that lack of decision was the head of the list of the thirty-on major causes of failure.

Procrastination, the opposite of decision, is a common enemy which practically every man must conquer.

Chapter IX, Persistence: The sustained effort necessary to induce faith; the eighth step toward riches

Persistence is an essential factor in the procedure of transmuting desire into its monetary equivalent. The basis of persistence is the power of will.

You Can Train Yourself to Be Persistent

Persistence is a state of mind, therefore it can be cultivated. Like all states of mind, persistence is based upon definite causes, among them these:

- Definiteness of purpose
- Desire
- Self-reliance
- Definiteness of plans
- Accurate knowledge
- Cooperation
- Willpower
- Habit

People refuse to take chances in business, because they fear criticism which may follow if they fail. *The fear of criticism in such cases is stronger than the desire for success.*

The Last Great Prophet, Reviewed by Thomas Sugrue

When the armies of the prophet entered Jerusalem not a single person was killed because of his faith. When the crusaders entered the city, centuries later, not a Moslem man, woman, or child was spared. But the Christians did accept one Moslem idea – the place of learning, the university.

Chapter X, Power of the Master Mind: The driving force; the ninth step toward riches

Power is essential for success in the accumulation of money.

Plans are inert and useless, without sufficient power to translate them into action.

Power may be defined as “organized and intelligently directed knowledge.” Power, as the term is here used, refers to organized effort, sufficient to enable the individual to transmute desire into its monetary equivalent. Organized effort is produced through the coordination of effort of two or more people, who work toward a definite end, in a spirit of harmony.

...the sources of knowledge:

- Infinite Intelligence
- Accumulated experience
- Experiment and research

No individual may have great power without availing himself of the “Master Mind.”

The psychic phase of the Master Mind principle is much more difficult to understand. You may catch a significant suggestion from this statement: “No two minds ever come together without, thereby, creating a third, invisible, intangible force which may be likened to a third mind.”

The human mind is a form of energy, a part of it being spiritual in nature. When the minds of two people are coordinated in a spirit of harmony, the spiritual units of energy of each mind form an affinity, which constitutes the “psychic” phase of the Master Mind.

Chapter XI, The Mystery of Sex Transmutation; the tenth step toward riches

Happiness is found in doing, not merely in possessing.

“Genius” Is Developed Through the Sixth Sense

The reality of a sixth sense has been fairly well documented. This sixth sense is creative imagination.

The faculty of creative imagination is the direct link between the finite mind of man and the Infinite Intelligence. All so-called revelations, referred to in the realm of religion, and all discoveries of basic or new principles in the field of invention, take place through the faculty of creative imagination.

Sex energy is the creative energy of all geniuses. There never has been, and never will be a great leader, builder, or artist lacking in this driving force of sex.

The Storehouse of Personal Magnetism

A teacher, who has trained and directed the efforts of more than 30,000 salespeople, made the astounding discovery that highly sexed men are the most efficient salesmen. The explanation is, that the factor of personality known as “personal magnetism” is nothing more nor less than sex energy. Highly sexed people always have a plentiful supply of magnetism. ... This energy may be communicated to others through the following media:

- The hand-shake
- The tone of voice
- Posture and carriage of the body
- The vibrations of thought
- Body adornment

The Uselessness of Wealth without Women

Man’s greatest motivating force is his desire to please woman!

Take women out of their lives, and great wealth would be useless to most men. *It is this inherent desire of man to please woman which gives woman the power to make or break a man.*

Chapter XII, The Subconscious Mind: The connecting link; the eleventh step toward riches

The subconscious mind works day and night. Through a method of procedure, unknown to man, the subconscious mind draws upon the forces of Infinite Intelligence for the power with which it voluntarily transmutes one’s desires into their physical equivalent, making use always of the most practical media by which this end may be accomplished.

You cannot *entirely* control your subconscious mind, but you can voluntarily hand over to it any plan, desire, or purpose which you wish transformed into concrete form. Read again, instructions for using the subconscious mind, in the chapter on Autosuggestion.

The Seven Major Positive Emotions:

- The emotion of desire
- The emotion of faith
- The emotion of love
- The emotion of sex
- The emotion of enthusiasm
- The emotion of romance
- The emotion of hope

The Seven Major Negative Emotions (To Be Avoided)

- The emotion of fear
- The emotion of jealousy
- The emotion of hatred
- The emotion of revenge
- The emotion of greed
- The emotion of superstition
- The emotion of anger

The Secret of Effective Prayer

If you pray for a thing, but have fear as you pray that you may not receive it, or that your prayer will not be acted upon by Infinite Intelligence, your prayer *will have been in vain*.

The subconscious mind is the intermediary, which translates one's prayers into terms which the Infinite Intelligence can recognize, presents the message, and brings back the answer in the form of a definite plan or idea for procuring the object of the prayer. Understand this principle, and you will know why mere words read from a prayer book cannot, and will never serve as an agency of communication between the mind of man and Infinite Intelligence.

Chapter XIII, The Brain: A broadcasting and receiving station for thought; the eleventh step toward riches

Anybody can wish for riches, and most people do, but only a few know that a definite plan, plus a burning desire for wealth, are the only dependable means of accumulating wealth.

Sometimes men speak lightly of the intangibles – the things which they cannot perceive through any of their five senses, and when we hear them, it should remind us that *all of us are controlled by forces which are unseen and intangible*.

Chapter XIV, The Sixth Sense: The door to the temple of wisdom; the thirteenth step toward riches

The thirteenth principle is known as the sixth sense, through which Infinite Intelligence may and will communicate voluntarily, without any effort from, or demands by, the individual.

This principle is the apex of the philosophy. It can be assimilated, understood, and applied only by first mastering the other twelve principles.

The sixth sense is that portion of the subconscious mind which has been referred to as the creative imagination. It has also been referred to as the "receiving set" through which ideas,

plans, and thoughts flash into the mind. The flashes are sometimes called hunches or inspirations.

Chapter XV, The Six Ghosts of Fear: Take inventory of yourself, as you read this closing chapter, and find out how many of the “ghosts” are standing in your way

There are six basic fears, with some combination of which every human suffers at one time or another:

- The fear of poverty
- The fear of criticism
- The fear of ill health
- The fear of loss of love of someone
- The fear of old age
- The fear of death

Symptoms of the Fear of Poverty:

- Indifference
- Indecision
- Doubt
- Worry
- Over-caution
- Procrastination

Symptoms of the Fear of Criticism:

- Self-consciousness
- Lack of poise
- Personality
- Inferiority complex
- Extravagance
- Lack of initiative
- Lack of ambition

Symptoms of the Fear of Ill Health

- Autosuggestion (negative use of)
- Hypochondria
- Exercise (lack of)
- Susceptibility
- Self-coddling
- Intemperance

Symptoms of the Fear of Loss of Love

- Jealousy
- Fault finding
- Gambling

Symptoms of the Fear of Old Age

- The tendency to slow down and develop an inferiority complex at the age of mental maturity (around forty)
- The habit of speaking apologetically of one’s self as “being old” merely because one has reached the age of forty or fifty, instead of reversing the rule and expressing gratitude for having reached the age of wisdom and understanding

The habit of killing off initiative, imagination, and self-reliance by falsely believing one's self too old to exercise these qualities. The habit of the man or woman of forty dressing with the aim of trying to appear much younger, and affecting mannerisms of youth, thereby inspiring ridicule by both friends and strangers.

Symptoms of the Fear of Death

The habit of thinking about dying instead of making the most of life, due, generally, to lack of purpose, or lack of a suitable occupation

How to Protect Yourself against Negative Influences

To protect yourself against negative influences, whether of your own making, or the result of the activities of negative people around you, recognize that you have a will-power, and put it into constant use, until it builds a wall of immunity against negative influences in your own mind.

Recognize the fact that you, and every other human being, are, by nature, lazy, indifferent, and susceptible to all suggestions which harmonize with your weaknesses.

Recognize that negative influences often work on you through your subconscious mind, therefore they are difficult to detect, and keep your mind closed against all people who depress or discourage you in any way.

Clean out your medicine chest, throw away all pill bottles, and stop pandering to colds, aches, pains and imaginary illnesses.

Deliberately seek the company of people who influence you to think and act for yourself.

Do not expect troubles as they have a tendency not to disappoint.

Without doubt, the most common weakness of all human beings is the habit of leaving their minds open to the negative influence of other people.