

the ChimpanZine



#2

March 2011

Warning: The author relies on semi-colons to get through this article the way you do cigarettes to get you through the day. Do not proceed if they make you squeamish.

Contribution No. 1 by Pam Troglodytes

In the interest of making *ChimpanZine* the most widely read periodical since, well, *Life*, or *The National Geographic* when it featured New Guineans with nice nose piercings and tops optional for the women, we thought we would start our first contribution with a bang - The Meaning of Life.

Ha! Sorry; there is no meaning, you are on you own, but here are a few hints.

First, the only thing you have going is that you're awake and reading this. Actually, the only thing you have going is that you're awake; even the reading part is suspect. Look, if you're not awake, you're not reading this and the question is moot. Being conscious as the only thing you're sure of is not exactly a novel idea; Descartes probably summed it up best with "Cogito Ergo Sum", which is Latin for "I am OK; you, I'm not so sure about." So, OK, you can trust yourself, because you're pretty sure that you

and you alone are only having these thoughts. But that's all you know; you can't trust the thoughts themselves.

The next thing that seems pretty real is that if you trip over a branch your shin hurts, and the self-same brain that seems to be you also definitely seems to be you when you're hurting. So your consciousness seems to be attached to a physical package. But you can't even be sure that it's your brain that is doing all this thinking. If you've ever had sex, you're pretty sure it isn't. You know that your shin hurts, but you don't have a clue about much else other than that the lump on your leg is swelling, and feels worse as you obsessively fiddle with it.

If all you want is the truth, you can stop now, because everything else after this is speculation, guesswork and make believe.

Wise men, most lately Hegel, noted that "the owl of Minerva flies after dusk." Other than sounding all cool and mystically ornithological, he was making a very valid point. All consciousness, all understanding, takes place after an event has occurred. As we observe our shin turning blue, it's taken place after our dumb-ass tripped over the branch, and after it previously was red. All our observations are post-facto. The world

has moved on, and is moving on as we try to observe it. The train has left and is always leaving the station. As you stand there, suitcase in hand, thinking all these great thoughts, you can never be sure of what you're thinking. The thinking is real, the content is not. Not only is there the six-second delay, but you have to think as you're seeing it, and think about what you have seen, and then you have to think how it compares to everything else you've ever seen, and then how it is alike (or not). You do this pretty quickly, but while you're doing it, the world is pouring more tricks out of its infinite sleeve far faster than your beady little mind can digest them. The best you can do is try to pigeon-hole all of this experience, so if something similar happens again, you can say "ah-ha", I've seen this before. Ever since the day you said goodbye to mom's tum, you've been building a model of the world, plugging in the new data as it keeps rolling in. Basically all thought is based on proving or disproving an analogy. This is like *that*, but not like *that*. All of the immediate thises are compared to all the previous thats.

While you're contemplating that, I just kicked your shin again. Consider all the other thoughts that accompanied it. "Shit, that hurts." "Shut up, you big baby." "Why

me?" "Will Sylvia be sympathetic, or think I'm an idiot for tripping in the first place?"

Which leads to the next universal truth: We don't have a lot of control over consciousness. It may be your movie, because I'm pretty sure you're watching it, but you're not necessarily directing. The mind is a whirling cesspool of seemingly random thoughts that are only coherent because at least they are *your* thoughts, and all *this* seems to be happening to *you*. The Tibetan Buddhists liken consciousness to an untamed horse. One of the principles of meditation is to bring that horse under bridle, so that we might have a chance to direct where we're riding. That is why they say our outcomes are so guided by fate (Karma); we are at the mercy of the scenes (real or not) placed before us and our reaction to them. Life may or may not be scary, but it is certainly weird: an ongoing mystery taking place (maybe) within your own little skull with seeming little actual input from our end. Try not to think about this sentence. See. (OK, that was cheating, but I think you see the point).

If you've ever seen a rodeo, you know that breaking horses is difficult. It is hard to direct your mind. This is also known

as "thinking", and it's difficult. If you don't think so (ha-ha) stop reading this drivel, and get back to your calculus problem sets, or sit meditating for a half-hour beyond what the roshii tells you. Instead of *thinking*, and directing our thoughts, we like *observing*, letting our consciousness drift along with just enough stimulation to keep us from nodding off. We have names for what we like to watch: drama and comedy. Drama reinforces our sense of propriety by delivering consequences to actions; a neat state of affairs that doesn't seem to mirror real life (which doesn't keep us from continually applying dramatic story lines to our life, and those around us who make up the cast of our internal movies). In comedy, life does have consequences, but they don't hurt. This is the social equivalent of morphine; you can feel the pain, but you don't care.

From here isn't much of stretch to recognize "reality" as an illusion. First, it is entirely internal, and second, your knowledge of it based on conclusions that are entirely self derived.

Wait. Before you light up another joint, trip back over the tree branch. When Sylvia tripped over the branch after taking a hit, you may have thought she was a klutz, a stoner, or felt sorry for her, but empirically you knew she experienced something pretty similar to what you did when

you tripped over it several paragraphs ago.

We all may be processing the movie differently, but everyone is still making a movie with a script and a cast. And there's always a plot to the movie even if it's as simple as the desire to be fed when hungry, and come in when it's cold. Most people want a more elaborate production than that, with plot lines like affection, sex, living forever, and other thrills, but the basic story for all of us is to keep eating and avoid chronic pain. Everything else is either comedy or drama.

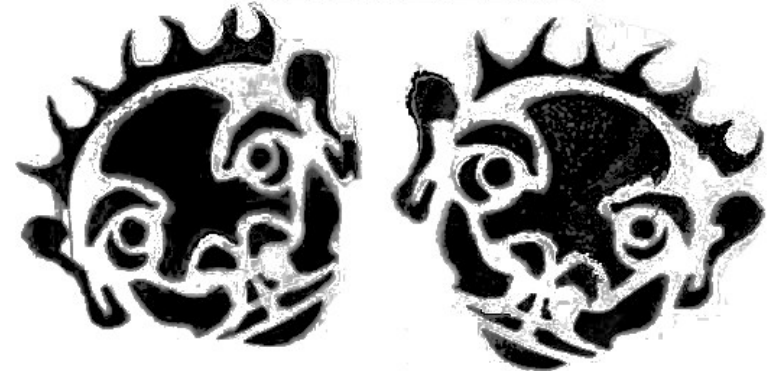
What if there is a way to get control of the script?

If you become aware that everyone else is chewing scenery, stop chewing yours and step back and observe their craft. The method actor always asks "What's my motivation?" By understanding another's motivation, we have a chance to stop watching our own screenplay and become part of theirs. This isn't easy; our own consciousness always screams, "me, me, me". However, if you can see as "you, you, you", the movie is no longer internal and becomes universal. Sylvia isn't just a klutz and stoner, she's another out-of-control fool who is also pretty cute. This is why monks are celibate, so they can concentrate on the out of control

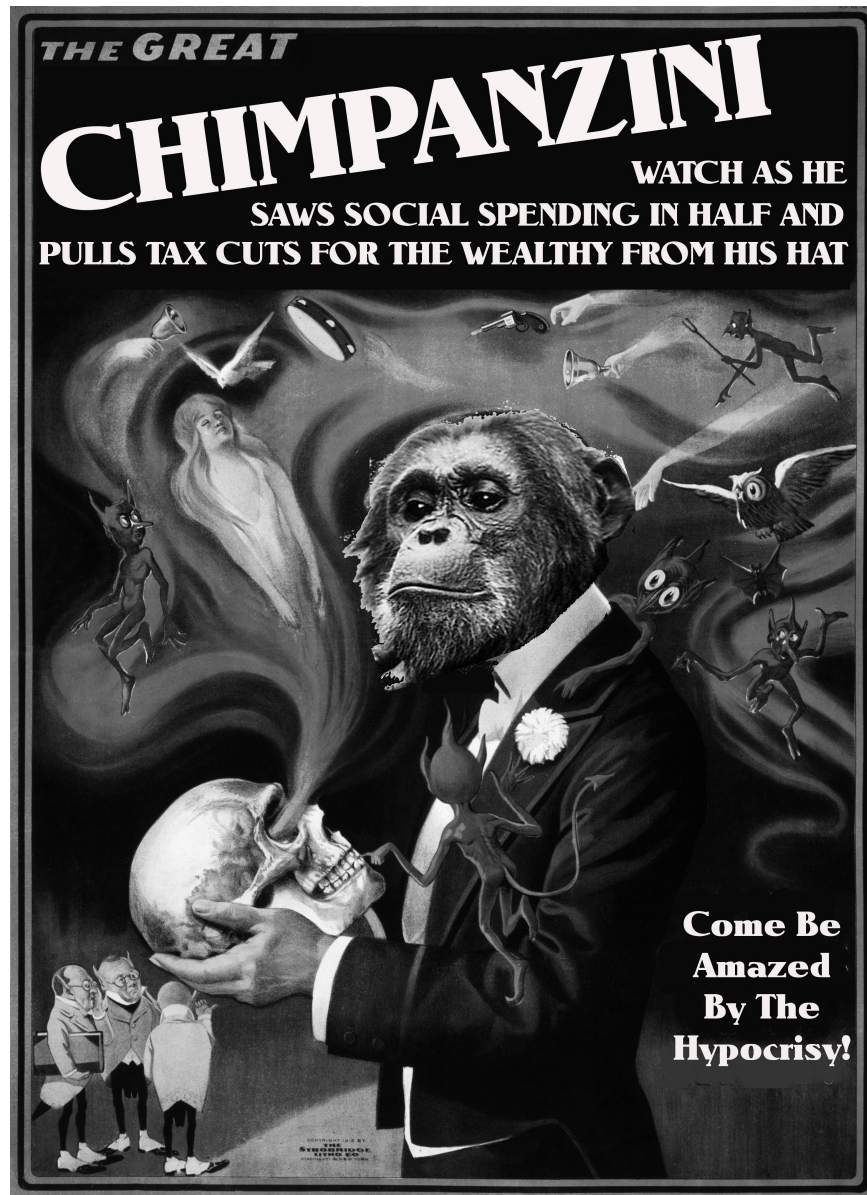
part, and not the cute.

So what did you expect? You already knew the meaning of life, but you didn't want to accept it. It's OK, none of us do. Life is hard, thinking is hard, compassion is hard. You already knew this. We all do, except most of the time, we'd rather knock off and watch the Three Stooges. It's OK if you do, after all, it's only your own mind that you're wasting. Everybody else is rewinding their own problems. Good luck.

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A Question of Violence

by Capuchin

I once saw an interviewer ask the Dalai Lama to elaborate his position on pacifism. Was it ever OK to resort to physical violence even in self defense?

His response was that violence never solves anything. In certain cases it can be instrumental in averting greater violence but even in this capacity it continues a cycle that can only be broken by nonviolent means.

The idea didn't surprise me, but the lack of dogma coming from a religious leader did. You mean it's up to me to decide when a lesser violence is necessary? You mean you're trusting me to take the hard route of non-violence whenever possible?

Too often in the past century, movements for change have encountered the question of violence, faltered, and failed. The result is a pair of activist armies dug in behind matching argument fortresses shouting insults across the breach. Both sides are losing, besieged in their calcified rhetoric, so who is winning?

The answer, as usual, is the people holding on to power.

Since the heyday of the Civil Rights Movement, the ruling classes have effectively manipulated the question of violence to their advantage. Their will-to-power saw the setback of successful non-violent mobilization as an opportunity in disguise. By belatedly (and retroactively) embracing the non-violent elements

of the Civil Rights Movement and attributing all successes to them, the powers that be initiated a process of legitimization which continues in full force today. Mainstream foundations, corporate sponsors and governments at all levels insist on a nonviolent platform before they will recognize, much less fund, any organization. Anyone who will not agree to this initial condition is relabeled a domestic terrorist.

Hear this clearly: I'm not throwing in my lot with proponents of a violent rebellion.

I'm not telling you to arm yourself and your six male children to attack the white house.

I'm not insisting you have to be willing to kill whitey in order to be part of the revolution.

I am asking you to consider why the state wants a monopoly on violence.

Every day we pour more money into our armed forces so they can more effectively kill in the name of the "war on terror". We arm our police so they can shoot youth of color in the name of the "war on drugs". The legitimacy of state violence is the flip side to the demand for non-violence among those who oppose worldwide oppression. A nuanced pacifist stance would not only open the door for the occasional act of defensive activist violence, it might demand the same strict level of accountability and justification for state sanctioned violence.

When Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. applied his non-violent rhetoric to the Vietnam War he lost his golden-boy status and only his timely assassination preserved his domesticated legacy as an American Hero. These days a world without

state violence is an impossibility safely relegated to the realm of idealism and anyone who would like to see a different world order must accept the idealist title and sign their name at the bottom of the dogmatic non-violent pledge or be shunned.

I'm not gonna let the state tell me that the only way to oppose state actions is a registered non-violent march to the Capitol.

I'm not gonna let NewsCorp media outlets tell me that the only way to oppose the state is to arm myself with high powered assault rifles and join a militia.

I'm gonna hold myself, the state and everybody I know to the same strict standard. Violence never solves anything, but don't let nonviolence be a choice someone else makes for you.

Capuchin says:



**Make
Art Not
War**