

Means and Ends

Children enjoy the why-game.

Sometimes, children do it for fun, they want to see if by asking why repeatedly, you will run out of answers. And actually, you do- at some point the answer becomes something like, "Because that's just the way it is."

I think adults should play the why-game with themselves, from time to time. We should ask ourselves important why-questions about what we do, what we live for, and keep asking that question until we reach the end of the chain.

Why do I work the way I work? Because I want to be successful. Why do I want to be successful? Because I want to earn a decent living. Why do I want a decent living? Because I want to enjoy good things: family, friends, food, laughter, my own house, and car, and possessions.

Why do I want to enjoy good things? Because I want to be happy. Why do I want to be happy?

If we keep asking this question, it will turn out that most of what we do in our lives is a means to something else. They are instruments to we use to get us something else. Work gets us success. Success gets us money. Money gets us things.

But at some point we reach something or even more than one thing which is not a means. It is not an instrument to get you something else. It is an end. It is something you value not because it will get you something else, but you value it for itself. When we reach that end-point we have reached your idea of the Good Life, your picture of what it is all about.

A lot of people never really ask what the end game is. In fact, I would say, a lot of people are afraid to ask that question. They're afraid that if they keep asking that question, they might arrive at an answer they don't like. Maybe an answer of meaninglessness, or maybe some religious answer. So a lot of people don't sit down with themselves and say, why do I do what I do? What do I hope to get? Why do I want that?

Most people are like Mr and Mrs Thing. Mr. and Mrs. Thing are a very pleasant and successful couple. At least, that is the verdict of most people who tend to measure success with a "thingometer." When the "thingometer" is put to work in the life of Mr. and Mrs. Thing, the result is startling. There he is sitting down on a luxurious and very expensive thing, almost hidden by a large number of other things. Things to sit on, things to sit at, things to cook on, things to eat from, all shining and new. Things to amuse, and things to give pleasure and things to watch and things to play. Things for the big thing in which they live and things for the kitchen and things for the bedroom. And things on four wheels and things on two wheels. And there in the middle are Mr. and Mrs. Thing smiling and pleased pink with things, thinking of more things to add to their things. Secure in their castle of things.

Every night, they are aware that there are people out there interested in stealing their things. They must lock their doors, arm their system and protect their things. But they can't keep their things forever. The problem for Mr and Mrs Thing is that their things will not always be with them.

And some day, when they die, they only put one thing in the box....them..

People like Mr and Mrs Thing never ask the why question, they are happy to just run the rat race, accumulate, and consume.

But if you ask the why-question, and keep asking it, until you reach an end-point, you will probably arrive at something like: happiness, or love, or peace, or well-being, or pleasure. Whatever it is, it is important to know, because that's the thing you are building your whole life on. You get up early in the morning because that really is why you are living for.

Whatever that thing is, we only have one life to live, so it had better be the right thing. Because if you choose to make your life about pleasure, and pleasure disappoints you, or make it about love, and relationships betray you, or you make it about peace, and peace escapes you, you will come to the end of your life with great bitterness. To read the last words of people who lived for the wrong end is frightening.

Scottish writer Thomas Carlyle's last words were, "I am as good as without hope. A sad old man gazing into the final chasm alone."

Voltaire, the well-known sceptic said on his death-bed "I am abandoned by God and man! I will give you half of what I am worth if you will give me six months' life.

Thomas Hobbs, the philosopher said, "I say again, if I had the whole world at my disposal, I would give it to live one day. I am about to take a leap into the dark with no redeemer to save me!"

What kind of thing is worth putting at the top of your life, the end from which everything else comes? In the 17th century, a French philosopher named Blaise Pascal said, "the human heart seems to have a hole of infinite depth, and it can be filled only by an object that is infinite, in other words, by God Himself."

Now, many people feel that they can ignore or postpone the question of God, but in fact, what we are talking about here shows that no one can. Whatever you put at the end of your chain of values, whatever is the thing you believe is the ultimate good, the thing you live for – that thing is your god. Perhaps love, perhaps pleasure, perhaps fame or fortune, or power, or peace, or happiness, or a family, or some status, but in the end – that thing is your god. The question all of us have to face is this: is this thing I am looking to really big enough to fill a hole that is infinitely deep?

Solomon found that riches, power, pleasure, fame, wisdom couldn't do it. No, we need something and someone much greater. We need at the top of our lives something that can explain two things: creation, and conscience.

"Several years ago Encyclopedia Britannica published a fifty-five volume series entitled "The Great Books of the Western World." Mortimer Adler, noted philosopher and legal scholar was co-editor of the series. Basically the series marshaled the most eminent thinkers of the western world, their writings and the most important ideas, in other words, it's all the great thinking of the western culture. These ideas involve law, science, philosophy, history, theology, and even love. Everything that has shaped the minds and destinies of people--Fifty-five volumes. Do you know what the longest essay in those 55 volumes is on? The longest essay is on God--is on God.

When Mortimer Adler was asked by a reviewer why this theme merited such protracted coverage his answer was uncompromising. "It is because," he said, "more consequences from life follow from that one issue than any other." If there is God, then everything flows from His existence. All created matter and all moral law. If there is no God then how can you explain anything?"

Science hasn't disproved God. If anything, science keeps showing how mysterious the created order is. When DNA was first discovered, Francis Crick realised he was looking at a biochemical language, an information system that required an Intelligent Programmer. He said, "The DNA molecule is the most efficient information storage system in the entire universe. The immensity of complex, coded and precisely sequenced information is absolutely staggering. The DNA evidence speaks of intelligent, information-bearing design."

A scientist named Francis Wilczek recently wrote a book called "A Beautiful Question". IN it, he

describes how everywhere we look in nature, we find the beauty of symmetry – in mathematics, in particle physics, electromagnetics, quantum mechanics – there I order, beauty and design.

Whether we look in the microscope, or in the telescope, the universe is becomes more and more complex. Albert Einstein said, “We are in the position of a little child entering a huge library filled with books in many languages. The child knows someone must have written those books. It does not know how. It does not understand the languages in which they are written. The child dimly suspects a mysterious order in the arrangement of the books but doesn’t know what it is. That, it seems to me, is the attitude of even the most intelligent human being toward God. We see the universe marvelously arranged and obeying certain laws but only dimly understand these laws.”

Just as no child would believe that the Eiffel Tower assembled itself after millions of years of random pieces of metal landing on top of each other, so no adult should seriously believe that this design, order and beauty had no cause but itself.

Psalm 14:1 <To the Chief Musician. A Psalm of David.> The fool has said in his heart, "There is no God." (Ps. 14:1)

Whatever sits at the head of our values must be able to explain creation. But a second thing it must be able to deal with is conscience.

Conscience is a little built-in device that God has put in you to react to the moral law that is written in your heart. When you come into this world, you know what is right and wrong. You know it is wrong to cheat, to steal, murder. You know it is wrong because not only do you feel guilty, but when others do those things, you know it is wrong.

Your conscience is a warning system and it just makes you feel bad when you do what's wrong. So if you want to get out of that you can do two things. You can reprogram yourself so that your moral system is really completely reversed. If you have made pleasure or power or fame or fortune your god, then you are going to re-program your conscience to condone what you do.

The other thing people do is to ignore it altogether.

In 1984 an Avianca jet crashed, Avianca is the European airlines from Spain. An Avianca jet crashed in Spain, . As investigators began to study the accident they made an eerie discovery and this discovery that they make often is the curiosity that all of us look for, you know when they find the little black flight recorder. The black box cockpit recorder revealed that several minutes before a fatal impact, (the plane ran right into the side of a mountain), several minutes before the fatal impact there was a shrill computer synthesized voice like you hear on the telephone sometimes, a computer voice. And the little voice said in English, "Pull up, pull up, pull up, pull up, pull up!". Well it was a warning system, right? The pilot, (and the flight recorder had this on it), the pilot inexplicably snapped back, "Shut up Gringo . . . shut up Gringo!" and flipped off the warning voice . . . flipped the switch. Minutes later the plane smashed into the mountain and everybody was dead. That's a parable of how people are treating their consciences today. "Shut up gringo!"

Now I want to say to you that if the thing you love most requires either that you re-program your conscience or ignore it altogether, then that thing is not worth having as your god.

The Bible reveals a God who is infinite, and therefore the only one who belongs at the top of our loves. He explains both creation, and conscience. He created everything, which explains its beauty and symmetry, and order.

But it also explains conscience. He put that into the human heart, so we would know when we have broken His law. But he did more than that. The Bible teaches He made it possible for us, when we

have broken that law, to be forgiven, and to be reconciled to Him. The Bible teaches that God allowed evil into the world, because His plan was to send His Son, the Messiah, to become our scapegoat, take our sins and then rise again.

He made atonement for us, so that He can be at the head of our lives, the one great enough, and big enough to fill the human heart.

Christians make a claim that life without God, no matter how much you have, adds up to nothing. We believe that because Jesus Christ said it. He said, "What shall it profit a man if he gains the whole world, but loses his own soul" Which apparently means, that in God's eyes, a soul is worth more than all the goods and money and stuff of the whole world put together.

Your soul, your life is worth far more than all the money you will ever earn, all the goods you can ever acquire, all the Facebook friends you can accumulate. And if you accumulate more than most people, you can still end up in the red, in the loss column, if you lose your soul. You can keep pouring goods and pleasures into your soul, and if you are without a personal relationship with God, it will seem to empty out faster than you can pour it in.

Just about a month ago Hugh Hefner died. The founder of Playboy magazine died at 91, leaving behind a \$200 million empire.

Hefner grew up in a conservative family, but launched his Playboy magazine in the 1950s. He soon opened Playboy Bunny clubs, and by the 1960s, the circulation of his magazine had reached a million, 7 million by the 1970s. The Playboy empire eventually included the magazine, clubs, clothing lines, a TV network, a media empire. By 1960, Hefner bought the first of a few Playboy mansions, where he would throw infamous raucous parties.

He divorced his wife of ten years in 1959. He now lived a life of luxury, surrounded by models who lived with him in the mansions, and partied with him in his private jet.

He married three times, twice to Playmates. Before one of his weddings he was asked if he wanted a bachelor party, and he replied, "Why do I need a bachelor party? I've been having one every day for 30 years?"

Hefner really set the sexual revolution in motion. Not only did he normalise pre-marital sex, but he normalised pornography. He felt he was proudest that he done son.

But surely he had it all, right? Money, luxury, fame, pleasure, power.

With all that, Hefner confessed to the New York Times in 1992: "I've spent so much of my life looking for love in all the wrong places." In fact, on closer inspection, what did Hefner have?

The bunnies at the parties weren't really his friends. The women hanging on him were there for his money – they were using him as much as he was using them. His three wives were the closest thing he ever came to a less selfish life, but even his third wife was not at his side when he died.

He died of a back infection. He can take nothing of his fortune with him where he has now gone. His legacy is one of having exploited thousands of women, ruined many young women, ruined many a marriage, and led many a man into an addiction of pornography from which they can't escape. Only eternity will tell how much rape, betrayal, and pain were directly or indirectly caused by him.

This is how a Jll Filipovic writing for Time magazine summarised his life: "it's easy to see the price he paid, too, the things a callow and shallow little man will trade for some time in the spotlight next

to a blonde with a great rack. How fitting that, in death, Hef doesn't evoke hope or ambition, but that simplest and most patronizing of emotions: Pity."

Heffner is a man who had everything, but as we look at him now, it appears he had nothing.

Heffner was a lost soul. He had everything, but he had nothing. In the game of life, he looked like a lottery winner, until you look at him now, and now he appears to be one of the biggest losers. Nic is a man who has it all, and if he dies today, he only gains more.

So we finish this way: what is missing from a man, who gets fame, fortune, power, pleasure and a long life, but dies alone and without a real friend in the world.

what is present in a man, with no arms and legs, that makes him happier and more fulfilled than 99% of the people you meet?

The answer is the presence of a Person. The Person of Jesus Christ.

And if you care for someone, you ask, why are you doing all this? What is it all for? What is at the end of my chain of values? I don't want to waste this precious thing called life on a false god, who will never satisfy.

Can I encourage you to do the why-question with yourself? And when you reach that last one, ask yourself, can this thing explain creation? Can it calm my conscience? Is it big enough to fill the human heart?