I never seem to get anything done, but things keep happening anyway. It’s a problem of motivation, I suppose. There’s always too many things to do and no time to do them in. At the same time, there’s nothing to do and way too much time to do it in. Daily existence is fraught with such contradictions between perspectives, because as human beings we are wonderful at changing perspectives rapidly, not just from activity to activity, but from moment to moment, even in a single utterance, even while we are speaking a single word. The creative aspect lurks in just this ability: that of being able to choose at each moment which perspective to view things from. Emotion is said to cloud our ability to “think clearly”, which is ultimately nothing more than choosing to look at a situation from a perspective prompting us to direct action designed to bring about a desired result as predicted by the knowledge gained from using that perspective.

It is ultimately impossible to look at yourself from the perspective of another. We employ mirrors for this reason: our appearance to others, our social presence, is thus laid open to inspection and correction. We employ telescopes for this reason, as well: by attempting to gain an understanding of the stars so unimaginably distant, we hope to gain a new and more distant perspective by which to invert and view ourselves.

Religion enables us to “see the light” for ourselves: the light that is both within us and all around us. The holiness of God is such that, to believers, his transcendent, omniscient perspective, simply by existing, establishes meaning not only for the whole of reality, but also to each his or her own personal significance. The practical value of selecting such a perspective when external events are no longer responding to a previous worldview’s way of controlling and manipulating them is enormous. Religious beliefs provide a dwelling place for the soul in mourning, distraught, desolate: it conjures up a guiding hand in front of them, allows the kneeling, weeping believer to imagine themselves engulfed in the caring, painless arms of a loving God.

In the face of the emotionally-demolishing death of a loved one, instead of allowing them to contemplate on the violence, senselessness and endlessness of death, it offers them the peaceful perspective of Heaven, of an afterlife. It displays gloriously the personal significance and meaning which Death had violently unveiled—only to reveal what was obviously behind it the whole time, the ever-gentle hand of God. Massive earthquakes are reduced to little bumps on the seismograph: they are dealt with, caressed, worked through from a gentler, more distant perspective. The requirements of modern life are such that deep emotions must often be set aside and another perspective engaged, but the emotions are never truly detached for every passing second bears witness through the heartache of memory. Making a conscious effort to break free of remembering, or forgetting, is the essence of such a religious changing of perspective. Once-negative events are shown to be not quite as menacing in the more gentle light of God or “rationality” or (to put the barbs on, but I’m not exempting myself from the mass delusions) in the light of philosophy or art, and making this change of perspective, you are locked then in the chain of subsequent events requiring action, requiring again the ability to effortlessly manipulate the fragmented web of perspectives, the graceful and ever-changing self-deception which had been stopped temporarily short by the disruptive but ultimately human wellspring of emotions. It is human emotion that brings reality into sharp focus; whereas physical pain makes one aware of the body, emotion draws sharply the line between self and other, demarcates the ego with divisions of unequal suffering, yields that ambiguous feeling of a forgotten but piercing injustice. These illusions spun by generations upon generations of master story-tellers and despots have gripped
our minds unfailingly and unflinchingly in their grasp to the last man, and I admit I am certainly no exception. The human mind is being mass-conditioned and trained on a global scale, yet, paradoxically, in each case only indoctrinated with the local version of the cultural “story” of what constitutes acceptable, normal perspectives. Such independence of thought as philosophy is purported to have is itself a farcical mockery of the dependent condition of the human mind on its immediate environment, conditions and systems of belief and evaluations. For society by its very weight and monstrous scale upholds such a system of valuations, and enforces it—not only in the larger sense of legal systems and militaries and macroeconomics, but in the ways we speak to one another, the subtle artistry of the divisions of labor, the seemingly infinite ways capital ends up being distributed. Pre-existing systems of valuations are spliced violently into one another by the necessity of switching perspectives more rapidly, in our day and age, than ever before. The gaps created are given voice by emotions like anxiety, depression and nausea, now long ago usurped into accepted times and conditions for rationality or irrationality.

We have learned to accept many different perspectives simultaneously and we are in turn shaped by each. We collect and concoct our personality from the perspectives we are taught through the double-fanged intertwined training of conversation and gradual enculturation. Yet there is the inevitable human spirit, which despite all efforts to deny its presence, I find I am still absolutely inclined to belief. How can the human be a blank slate? Perhaps, ultimately, behind all the perspectives by which I look out into the world, and reflect to look back onto myself—I shall find I am nothing, that there is no meaning, that life is pointless, and I shall go further, and determine that life mostly sucks, that just about everyone is a selfish moron, and perhaps go even further and say things are royally fucked up, everybody knows it, and it’s about fucking time something wiped the slate clean. But by what gesture or utterance could I, or even any group of individuals, perform such a monumental task? The ego quails against the massive responsibility laid upon one’s shoulders by contrasting the world that could be if people woke up out of their delirium, and the world that is as it is.

Once again, it’s a dead end, just another useless perspective: so like the rational creature we all can choose to be, I decided to find a more useful one. So life may be pointless and futile with death as the inevitable and thus senseless end to an absurd existence; that just means that it’s up to me to make the meaning. That meaning resides in making my own choices. The paradox of my existence lies in my being simultaneously free and condemned to be free, is to me one of the most powerful lessons Sartre taught. In the final analysis, I cannot find meaning in the external world, nor can I find an abiding sense of absolute self by which to establish my personal significance. Mirrors only reveal the gap between who I am and what others perceive me to be.

Understanding and accepting this, we find that there is a golden path out of this forlornness and desperation: since we are without essence, we must choose to exist. That is, we must define ourselves, first as humans, but also socially, historically, linguistically, economically, politically: we must act, and to be moral when we do so, we must act responsibly and in good faith. It may seem that we are getting into another trap of perspectives, but I don’t think that “responsibility” and “good faith” are abstract, intangible things guaranteed by a constructed system: responsibility is as real as you and me talking together, as making a meaningful promise and keeping it, working together and accomplishing things. Good faith is as real as authenticating the meaningfulness of your actions within yourself, that is, comprehending your own honest or dishonest intentions; more simply, it’s acting purposefully and
meaning it. Perhaps argument could be said about the truth or nonsense of words like “action”, “yourself” and “honest”; such arguments are to me, in this case, uninteresting, since I believe that responsibility and meaning are things that are beyond what at best could only be a trivial and self-referential definition, since they both emerge from and point back to part of the basic nature of social interaction that speaks to an underlying human nature.

This “underlying human nature” is the common ground of all humanity, that part of us that includes and transcends the basic biological commonality, but comprises psychological, sociological existence, etc. Variations, in this case, are often variations on a theme. These variations (which result from the imperfect copy of culture the old society and parents combine to transmit to their children) are the individuality which is grafted onto the underlying human nature, the true core of who we are and yet also containing the kernel of truth of the collective. It is an understanding of both that science strives towards (an understanding of the interrelationships between individual and society, between body and mind,) and perhaps not necessarily in vain, for it seems that the creative element (what some call the soul, the mind, or the human spirit) will prove to be sensible. But, of course, its sensibility will be based on a perspective. Science can not simply be ignored, especially when it squares with what one can directly authenticate. It often seems that cognition is a calculatable function: neurons are closely analogous to logic circuits, and I believe that this analogy is not wholly incorrect. Cognition seems to be the ability to, when exposed to a given pattern, to find a different and opposing pattern that, within a given perspective, inverts it without negating it; for the pattern of an opponents move in chess, it is the ability to determine an opposing move. In conversation, it is responding meaningfully to another’s utterance.

The perspective that I’ve found that works is, to put it tritely, the perspective that works. I can accept the utilitarian argument, at least the pleasure principle, only in the following case: where no qualitative difference between equally self-valued perspectives, it is the ethical decision to rationally and methodically calculate the probability of creating suffering or happiness, and to choose and act upon that decision which maximizes the latter and minimizes the former. Other than that case, I believe one acts in bad faith by blindly applying the pleasure principle while ignoring the creative element of action: I believe that freedom, through creating action and authoring the fluctuating present, is flying with your soul and bringing the images of your dreams into reality; our actions have significance when they are art (relations with self resulting in gestures by the body that bring about some affect in the physical world) and when we participate in social action (relating with others in any capacity within a context created by the participants.) The more you learn about people the more you find everyone is more like you than you previously thought. Often the differences between us are nothing more than a socially-created mask that can be transcended once weakness is acknowledged and language is offered as a gift to the other. These are the holy and religious moments, and they are associated with happiness, but it is difficult without the feeling I’m leaving something essential out to lump together the infinitely various experiences of life that are graded incommensurably more subtly than “happiness” and “suffering.” Happiness lies in consumption, happiness lies in dwelling, happiness lies in building sexual energy and releasing it, happiness lies in contemplation, happiness lies in the present and happiness lies in memory. Happiness can result from a connection between people, happiness can be personal, emotional, spiritual; happiness can be completely unrelated to other people, but can be a result of personal accomplishment, of the fulfilling of a dream, in creating and in destroying. Happiness is found in motion
and in rest. It can simply be reaching a desired destination after a long drive. This list by no means intends a complete enumeration; further examples will be more meaningful if they are drawn from personal experience. “Pleasure” remains a pale, superficial imitation of what people are getting at when they describe a person’s condition to be that of “happiness.” It is not the sort of thing that be easily qualified or quantified in any sort of rational way: indeed, happiness, like physical health and abundance of material possessions, is often only truly known and appreciated retrospectively through a later perspective of sorrow and sickness of soul.

The paradox of perspective is beginning to close upon me: if perspectives are completely relative, and if context defines meaning, isn’t all this argumentation simply another example of provisional and perspective-based thought? All of the arguments fall to pieces unless one implicitly consents to the assumptions, most of which are not even written, but only hinted at (such is the best one can even seem to get out of this bitch, language.) However, I believe that, in the best case, a written work can reconstruct a train of thought. This is all I intend; indeed, often this is all that any art intends. Every work of art calls for your attention, for you to assent to its implicit assumptions. Questions arise naturally about the creator: why is this thing here? Who made it, and why? I argue that most works of art exist only for the purpose of representing and allowing the observer to recreate the aboriginal thought that resides mysteriously somewhere in the work of art, brought to life only by being heard, seen or read. Without this assent, without the implicit agreement between creator, work of art, and viewer, all communication would be impossible: we should be shut completely into isolated and mutually silent universes. But we are not: art, in the form of creatively-used language, manufactured images, beautiful or ugly articles that are exchanged, etc., surrounds us from the day of our birth. Its omnipresence is accepted as natural, when it is art itself which embodies humankinds’ violent rebellion against the existing order of things. Theodor Adorno reminds us: “Every work of art is an uncommitted crime.”

The soul of a human is his invisible creator: only by imagining an origin before ourselves do we think we can arrive at meaning, and thus by seeing life as a sort of artwork—for is the world not a stage?—we imagine that there is an intention behind fate, a purpose to life. A creation such as the universe could not have been created by accident; we are certain that such a brilliant and multi-faceted jewel must have an intention (typically divine) behind it. Perhaps this bias results from the rarity of unintentional brilliance by human beings; indeed, by not acting consciously and cautiously, we often lead ourselves astray. But by agreeing to such a God-as-watchmaker assumption, we forget that no origin prior to our own existence could ever establish a personal meaning in itself, for to do so, it would have to reference our own creation personally and actually establish meaning within it and for it, which it cannot do except in the collective or in our imaginations; also, to seek such an origin, we would have to first believe in the hidden and covert assumptions of the particular system that is propounding a specific creation story. You cannot believe, you cannot even know, without first assenting to the implicit assumptions intrinsic in a belief system, in its peculiar and unique perspective. So I do not ask belief—only magicians and tricksters will ever try to deny your freedom of thought in this way—I only thank you for being an other than me and yet agreeing to think through my thoughts again, to resurrect my paltry offering back to life after the words have laid dead and inert on the page.