

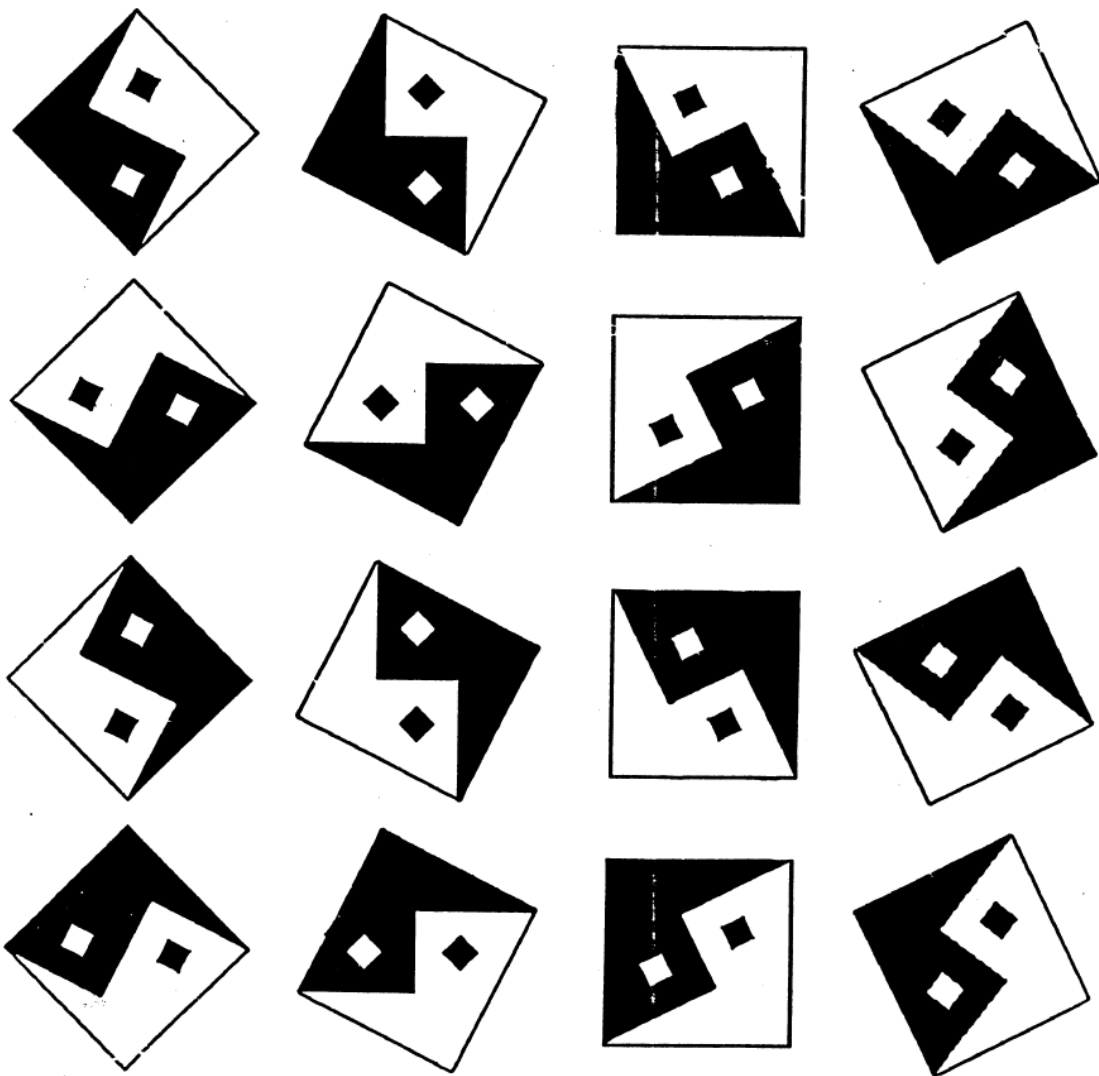
ENTROPY

VACCINE

FOR

FUTURE

SHOCK



NO. 1

INTRODUCTORY ISSUE

FALL 1988

INTRODUCTION

Extropy is vaccine for future shock. There are an enormous number of new ideas out there clamoring for your attention and your acceptance, some good, some bad. Extropy will prepare you for these competing ideas, or "memes" (see below), helping you to critically analyze them and select the best. The future is not going to go away - on the contrary change is going to *accelerate*. After wandering along at a slow pace for centuries, our world has started to enter a period of change that will far outpace historical standards. The changes occurring in the twentieth century dwarf those of any previous thousand years, but they only hint at what the future holds. We face a turning point in history - a time when computers, artificial intelligence, nanotechnology, self-modification, physical immortality and other factors promise to radically transform virtually every aspect of our existence. We are each of us responsible for preparing ourselves for that future, and for helping others to understand the coming age.

We may have to radically revise our present conceptual frameworks, values, and expectations if we are to both survive and prosper in the new age. Extropy presents an optimistic view of what is to come. That optimism is only partly a rational expectation based on the evidence - the

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Front cover: "Yang Yin-Yanging Around" (TWB)

Rear cover: "Triptych: Yin Yin-Yang, Yin-Yang Yin-Yang, and Yang Yin-Yang" (TWB)

Commentary: The (Yin) Yin-Yang is an ancient Chinese symbol representing the universe as consisting of co-dependent dualities in eternal flux. The dark Yin half of the Yin-Yang represents the passive, intuitive, feminine half of the duality. The light Yang half represents the active, critical, masculine half. Unlike the Good vs. Evil duality that splits the Christians' world asunder, neither Yin nor Yang bears an intrinsic moral value - they are impersonal natural forces. Traditionally, the Yin-Yang is represented in the circular form seen of the far left of the backcover's triptych. I call this the Yin Yin-Yang because its curvilinear form suggests the feminine aspects of the Yin force. As the Yin Yin-Yang's complimentary opposite I have designed the Yang Yin-Yang seen rolling around the front cover. These two versions of the Yin-Yang embrace on equal terms in the Yin-Yang Yin-Yang, seen in the center of the triptych on the back cover. (TWB)

rest is a nonrational (but not irrational) *attitude* towards the future. By having an upbeat view of things to come we can help to make that positive expectation true (for ourselves *and* others). Optimism can be self-fulfilling! Our expectation of the future is positive because it offers incredible opportunity, diversity, and possibility. Nanotechnology will, for example, enable us to store the amount of information recorded in a *trillion* books in the space of a cubic millimeter. You will be able to carry around the sum total of human knowledge *in your head*! Artificial intelligences, operating a million times more quickly than human brains, will carry out centuries' worth of design work in a few hours. A form of telepathy will be possible through the use of transducers connected to our nervous systems using electromagnetic waves. We will have intelligent machines, material abundance beyond our dreams, vastly expanded intelligences and senses, a pollution free environment, the ability to perfectly simulate any experience, and other wonders still undreamt. We don't expect everyone to believe all this, but if you realize that there enormous changes ahead of one form or another, you will want to follow the ideas in Extropy. We will cover these changes as they happen (and they are already underway), promoting understanding of and rational use of these opportunities.

"Entropy is the supreme enemy of human hope."

Why 'extropy'? All the positive ideas in Extropy share one thing in common: they promise to help us survive and prosper in an often hostile universe. As scientists describe it, our universe naturally tends toward entropy. Now, 'entropy' has several exact technical definitions, depending on which scientist happens

to be using the term. To statisticians it means a loss of order. Thermodynamicists use it to indicate a loss in the amount of usable energy. Information theorists equate entropy with a decrease in the amount of information. It is entropy that breaks down our cars, shorts out our computers, and withers our flesh. Entropy is the supreme enemy of human hope. Extropy presents a consistently anti-entropy point of view. We could have adopted 'negentropy' - literally 'negative entropy' - as our banner, but the word is too precise. 'Extropy', on the other hand, is a word all our own. We can leave the boundaries of its meaning loose for now, but its general intent is revealed by its etymology. Entropy' is derived from the greek 'en', or 'in', plus 'trepein', or 'change'. 'Extropy' comes from 'ex', or 'out', and 'trepein'. Thus while entropy decreases order, usable energy, and information, extropy increases all three of these goods necessary for human

well-being. In a universe that blindly threatens to drown us in a rising tide of disorder, extropy offers us safe passage to higher ground.

Extropy's general theme allows for a wide and diverse range of topics. Among other things, we'll cover artificial intelligence, cognitive science and neuroscience, intelligence-increase technologies, life extension, cryonics and biostasis, nanotechnology, spontaneous orders, space colonization, economics and politics (especially libertarian), science fiction and reviews of science fiction, intelligent use of psychochemicals, extropic psychology, mind-fucking, extropic moral and amoral theories, extropic scientific developments, memetics, aesthetics, and reviews of media on these topics. This first issue will be devoted to saying a little about each of these subjects and why we want to cover them in Extropy. Your written contributions on these and other extropic topics are always welcome.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE, COGNITIVE SCIENCE, AND NEUROSCIENCE

How can you understand what you are now reading? Until recently, your guess would have been as good as any. Scientific developments in cognitive science, artificial intelligence, and neuroscience have shed new light on the brain's operation, however. Only now are we beginning to see the true nature, and the vast potential, of human consciousness.

Cognitive science tries to explain the phenomena of intelligence, such as perception, memory, learning, inference, reasoning, deliberation, deciding, language use, motor control, and so on. Artificial intelligence (AI) is founded on the belief that these elements of intelligence have a physical basis and that it should be possible to design and build machines that have real intelligence. Advanced AI may possess only some of the abilities that humans have or it may have all those abilities and more. Throughout most of the history of thought it had been assumed that intelligence and consciousness resided in the non-physical soul and that the body was merely an earthly vehicle. A few of the Greek philosophers were materialists - people who believe that everything about us can be explained physically through the sciences - but it was Julian De La Mettrie, in the 18th Century, who expressed in his book *Man, A Machine*, the view that not only all the phenomena of life could be accounted for physically, but also that the organization of physical matter could account for consciousness and intelligence.

In the 1980's the majority view among philosophers and other workers in these areas is that De La Mettrie was right. Religion and theology are not appropriate authorities; we must look to cognitive science and neuroscience for answers (as well as for fruitful new questions about consciousness). Extremely promising and productive research is

now underway in these fields and speculations are no longer about whether we are physical beings, but about what we can do with this knowledge. If we can build intelligent machines why not also transfer our own consciousness into a machine? If our personality is a function of the organization of the brain it should, in principle, be possible to duplicate that information in another structure, one not necessarily made of the same materials. If this can be done, we can create duplicates of ourselves to be activated in the event of the destruction of the original.

"Religion and theology are not appropriate authorities."

Another exciting prospect opened up by the physicalist perspective is that once we understand how our brains process information and produce all the phenomena which we collectively call "intelligence", it should be possible for us to modify ourselves moderately or radically, depending on individual preference. We could change the way we perceive things either by increasing the power of existing senses or by adding new sensory modalities. (MTO & TWB)

INTELLIGENCE-INCREASE TECHNOLOGIES

Better understanding of the workings of our brains will have the fundamentally important consequence of allowing us to augment our intelligence. There are other means to intelligence boosting, some of which are already available. For example, certain nutritional and dietary manipulations have apparently produced increases in cognitive abilities such as memory and learning. There are also memory techniques (used by very few people), and methods of thinking which can give you an edge. There is evidence that certain naturally occurring substances (such as choline - a vitamin B co-factor) can improve memory, and there is a whole class of new drugs in development which should have more powerful effects. Understanding of the physiology and functioning of the brain should make it possible to artificially accentuate perceptual discriminations,

improve memory, sharpen concentration, and heighten awareness along other axes of consciousness.

We can increase our intelligences by changing the world *outside* of our brains as well. Consider 'hypertext', a computer-based system for linking text and other information with immediately accessible cross-references. If *this* was in hypertext, you'd be able to read the original sources we cite now - you wouldn't have to laboriously track them down in a library. Hypertext will allow us to pursue our intellectual fancies in a database containing the sum of recorded human knowledge - no matter how far afield our interests may wander. What's more, the interactive nature of hypertext will allow its users to easily add their own comments, critiques and contributions to the database. Like our own brains, hypertext stores data in a dynamic web of interrelations - hence it will in some measure become society's brain. Such a radical innovation will no doubt make the impact of the printing press seem meagre in comparison.

Still more fantastic is the possibility of 'mind machines' that break down the barrier between the brain and the external world. Both of us editors are actively researching already existing mind machines, such as Isolation Tanks, the Relaxman, and the Star Chamber, and we'll keep Extropy's reader's abreast of our experiences. What's more, Tom will be reporting on the development of his Mindcom device, a mind machine designed to allow direct brain-to-brain communication. Such mind machines promise to not only augment individual intelligences, but to allow them to join into communal 'super brains'. (TWB & MTO)

LIFE EXTENSION

Over the last 20-30 years there has been an increasing public interest in health and fitness, and during the last decade this has evolved into a more self-conscious interest in life extension. Among a few people this has been taken further into the pursuit of biological immortality - neverending existence in the physical world - the only one we *know* to exist. This is a highly extropic pursuit since the indefinite preservation of one's consciousness is the indefinite preservation and expansion of the information uniquely embodied in that consciousness. Under the heading of life extension we want to run articles that not only give little known hints that could extend your life-span, but also philosophical and physiological analysis regarding resistance to the idea of biological immortality, its effects on society and the individual.

The subject of life extension should be an extremely rich one as we reach the end of the Electronic Eighties and enter the Neural Nineties, as breakthroughs accelerate and the idea catches on even more than it has. Relatively little thought has been given to the long-term and recondite effects of physical immortality, and Extropy is a perfect forum for such cogitations. Also, there is an enormous amount of garbage information in this field and it can be very confusing trying to decide what works and what doesn't. Extropy will act as a meeting place of well-informed individuals with analytical and critical minds able to cut through the nonsense and make well-founded suggestions aimed at the practicing immortalist. (MTO)

CRYONICS AND BIOSTASIS

Cryonics is the practice of treating those declared legally or clinically dead with protective chemicals and then reducing their temperature and storing them at -196°C in the hope that future technology will be able to repair the damage done by the freezing process, cure whatever killed the person, and control aging. Biostasis is a more general term that includes cryonics but which would also cover vitrification and suspended animation. Cryonics has been in the news recently due the controversy surrounding the suspension of Dora Kent by the Alcor Life Extension Foundation (located in Riverside, California). Alcor and other cryonics groups have been expanding as new members join and better explanations and promotion of the ideas of cryonics have been forthcoming.

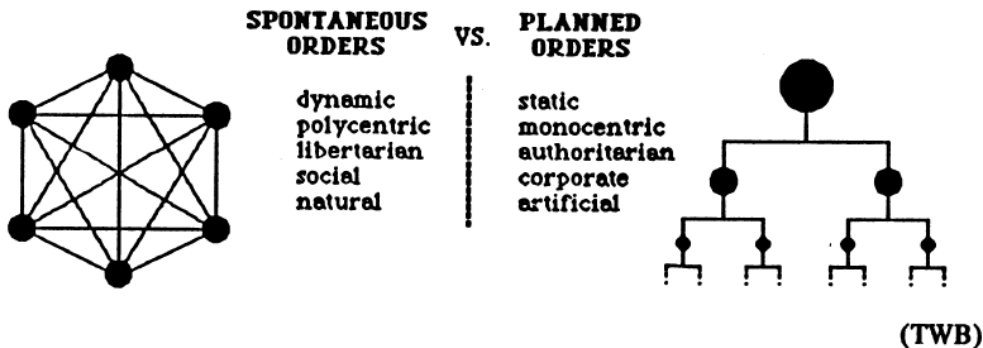
A number of life extensionists have become involved in cryonics due to the realization that they could die before the aging process has been understood and controlled. Despite enormous advances in the understanding of aging, its study is still in the embryonic stages. It looks like all but the youngest may not make it without cryonics and even the young may not live as long as they hope! Extropy will publish articles on the technical, social, psychological, and organizational sides of the subject. For those interested in the current details, affairs, and debates in the cryonics field, I recommend a subscription to CRYONICS, \$20/year from the Alcor Life Extension Foundation, 12327 Doherty St., Riverside, CA 92503. (MTO)

NANOTECHNOLOGY

We now stand on the threshold of the greatest of all technological revolutions: the ability to build molecules atom by atom. If this seems less than astounding, consider some of the benefits that such this new technology, called 'nanotechnology', will yield: medical devices small enough to travel the bloodstream and repair single cells, making us perfectly healthy, younger, stronger, and smarter; self-replicating 'assemblers' able to build any physically possible structure for no more than the cost of its rawest materials; and artificial brains as complex as human ones, yet only a cubic centimeter large and a *million* times as fast. These and other of nanotechnology's many benefits - and dangers - are chronicled in K. Eric Drexler's *Engines of Creation*. It's essential reading for anyone who plans to take full advantage of the future's possibilities, but if you can't find the time, Extropy will at least provide the basics, while also keeping you up to date on this rapidly developing science. (TWB)

SPONTANEOUS ORDERS

Who invented language? Who thought up money? Who is responsible for our society's customs? No one - these are all three 'spontaneous orders' that have arisen unforeseen through the free actions of individuals seeking their own interests. Spontaneous orders (also known as 'abstract', 'social', or 'polycentric' orders) find their contraries in planned orders (also known as 'concrete', 'corporate', or 'monocentric' orders). Whereas spontaneous orders tend to come about through the voluntary cooperation of all concerned, planned orders tend to be imposed on others by those who take command of their hierarchical structures. All of the most inhumane social institutions have shared the features of planned orders (though planned orders *can* serve humane ends when manifested in companies that lure employees through sole economic incentives). Spontaneous orders, on the other hand, benefit all who join them. Extropy will more fully delineate the features of these two sorts of order, demonstrating that rather than submitting to the planned orders that now coercively rule so much of our lives, we can more fully enjoy the future's promise from within cooperative, voluntary spontaneous orders.



PSYCHOCHEMICALS

Few of us hesitate to take an aspirin for a headache, and only the foolhardy forego antibiotics when stricken with an infection, yet most people shun psychochemicals even though they can cure perhaps the most debilitating illness of all: conceptual blindness. The radical changes that the future is sure to bring will demand corresponding changes in the ways we conceive of the world. The intelligent use of psychochemicals can help us to see the world in new ways, curing us of the conceptual blindness that limits us to dangerously outmoded paradigms. Yes, the use of psychochemicals such as THC delta-9, LSD-25, psilocybin, mescaline, and MDMA carries some risks, but the same is true of even good old aspirin. In fact, while there are no known cases of LSD-25 overdose, the same can hardly be said of most of the drugs in the average medicine cabinet - including aspirin! The most dangerous consequence of the intelligent use of psychochemicals is reactionary seizures resulting in chronic imprisonment. Extropy will help its readers slip past statist barriers, weave through subcultural mazes, and rise above social stigmas, delivering them to that distant boundary marking the end of the human experience and the beginning of the psychochemical one. (TWB)

EXTROPIC PSYCHOLOGY

Do you want to be an übermensch? 'Übermensch' (overman or superman) is the German word used by Friedrich Nietzsche to describe the individual (male or female) who has overcome all obstacles to the perfection of him-

or herself. An übermensch is one who has transvaluated all values (again to use Nietzsche's terminology) - which means examining all the moral and metaphysical ideas on which self and culture operate, then discarding those that make no sense in the pure light of reason, given an understanding of what one really wants out of life. Extropians are individuals who believe in growth, both in their own abilities and intelligence and in their culture. Yet there are numerous forces in our society telling us that we should pursue others' goals and not our own, that happiness and progress are unrealistic, and that we should not be preoccupied with ourselves.

In Extropy we are going to discuss ways of removing and protecting yourself from these entropic forces. We are going to analyze the ways in which we allow ourselves to be restricted and made unnecessarily stupid in our behavior and thinking. Some of the ideas that we want to present have been put forward by thinkers such as Nathaniel Branden, Peter Breggin, and Harry Browne (in his excellent and liberating book *How I Found Freedom in an Unfree World*). We're looking for articles on personal freedom psychology, how to improve intellectual and emotional communication, and on how to develop your particular talents and excellences. Extropians are already special people, in that they reject the common entropic perspective and have the insight and courage to choose the perspectives-expanding extropian paradigm. It is intended that articles in this area will reinforce our ability to live in accordance with this unlimited model of reality and self. If you are already an extropian you can *become* an übermensch! (MTO)

(A)MORALITY

Along with many new opportunities, the future will bring new choices. We will each no doubt want to choose what is right, but what is right? For who? Why? These are questions that morality, the study of the principles of human conduct, purports to answer. In Extropy we'll seek the moral principles most appropriate to achieving and enjoying a future free of disease and want, a future of nearly unlimited human potential. Even if we find that no single moral theory can be applied universally (as Max argues in this issue's "Morality or Reality?"), we'll at least learn how to discover those particular principles that will best serve our own individual interests, however they may be defined. Perhaps just as importantly, we'll learn to defend ourselves from those who may try to force *their* moral theories on us, unreasonably limiting our freedoms and forcing us to serve others' interests. (TWB)

MINDFUCKING

Are you shocked by the term 'mindfucking'? We hope so! Mindfucking is meant to do just that: lead you along, work you over, freak you out, and fuck you up! Just as one who loves humanity may find it worthwhile to assassinate a tyrant, so too we who abhor entropy find that a little chaos, properly applied, can have wondrous results. Mindfucking, like (and unlike) meditating on Zen koans, tears down old, counterproductive cognitive structures, leaving room for new, extropic ones.

**"Mindfucking
is semi-serious
and semi-fun."**

By its nature mindfucking is semi-serious and semi-fun. We will therefore be running some weird and amusing stuff in Extropy both to fuck with your mind and to give you tips on how to make more effective love to other minds. The idea of mindfucking is prominent in the magnificent *Illuminatus!* by Robert

Shea and Robert Anton Wilson (both extropians). In this book Operation Mindfuck is explained and it soon becomes obvious that the book itself is one of the greatest pieces of mindfucking ever. In Extropy we want to explore ways in which mindfucking can be used to open up people's brains to extropian perspectives. Perhaps we can go beyond simple mindfucking to advanced forms of mental sex. Especially considering the meme idea it seems reasonable to come up with mental foreplay, and to invent theories of mental AIDS (which would be a deficiency in the mental immune system that allows in destructively entropic ideas).

As part of our mindfucking mission we will have a regular feature called Weirdness Watch. This will cover all kinds of unrespectable ideas from the obviously loony and the profoundly unserious (such as the Church of the Sub-Genius) to interesting heresies like Wilhelm Reich's orgone and Velikovsky's cosmology. There will also be information on (and possibly excerpts from) bizarre comics and books and anything else that may rudely shake up your preconceptions and show you (accidentally or not) new perspectives. Enlightenment can come from the strangest sources! (MTO &TWB)

Timothy Leary has said that Earth is the womb of the human race. We are currently experiencing the technical, scientific, and social labor pains that indicate that it is time to leave the womb. Even if population is not the problem that many people think it is, many are still attracted to the great spaces out there. Not only is there space, there are massive quantities of resources waiting to be exploited for the purposes of both the spacers and those left on Terra. The asteroids and the planets are waiting to give us their almost unlimited gifts, and beyond them are the other solar systems and galaxies. Extropy can be promoted by the continual outward expansion of human beings (and whatever humans may become), and by the mutations - both physical and psychological - that will ensue.

The vast expanses of space offer us the opportunity to make a fresh start - or as many fresh starts as we like. New frontiers have always excited the imagination. America was seen as a chance to experiment with new social orders, new religions, and new ways of living. To some extent, especially on the West Coast, this

spirit is alive and flourishing, but such experiments are severely hampered by existing governments which lay claim to every inch of the planet. As space colonization becomes commonplace it is inevitable that we will see colonies devoted to particular philosophies. Some colonies will attempt to finally create the socialist paradise free of all capitalist contamination. Most space enthusiasts, however, are libertarians of one kind or another, so we will see many experiments in minimal government and free market anarchy. Fundamentalist religions will have their own colonies too, but at least we won't have to suffer them where we live! No doubts Terran governments will try to stop this diversity and experimentation but their efforts will not succeed for long.

**"Earth is the
womb of the
human race."**

Articles are welcome on any aspect of the space migration, whether it is current governmental and non-governmental attempts to break out of gravity, descriptions of possible future space life-styles, exo-psychology (the study of the effects of living off the planet), or more abstruse speculations about life off the edge. We will no doubt run information on O'Neill's concept of rotating cylindrical space colonies since everyone should

know about these well-developed plans, but discussion will not be limited to the currently familiar. Extropians have a strong interest in promoting and anticipating the off-world revolution because of its enormous effects on diversity, intelligence, and information. Any groups involved in this effort are welcome to write to us and we will print your address and a brief description of your activities. (MTO)

ECONOMICS AND POLITICS

As information processing systems, good economic and political systems must meet the same standards that apply to any of their kind; they must achieve their ends efficiently. Researchers such as Friedrich Hayek have demonstrated that the most efficient economic and political systems are those that exert a minimum of control, allowing spontaneous orders (see above) to flourish. Economic and political systems must furthermore advance human ends. Extropy takes the point of view that these two qualifications are entirely compatible; the most efficient economic and political systems are those that maximize human liberty. Thus the best economic systems are free market, and the best political systems libertarian. (Libertarianism asserts that the state, if one is necessary, should permit all acts except assault, theft and fraud.) Extropy will pursue such free market and libertarian analyses of economic and political systems, working toward the day when economic and political systems serve us, rather than we them. (TWB)

MEMETICS

Memetics is the study of memes (*meme* rhymes with *cream*). memes are ideas that can replicate and evolve. Memetics dates from the 1976 publication of Richard Dawkins fascinating book, *The Selfish Gene* (Oxford University Press) and is a new and potentially fruitful approach to the study of how ideas spread. As Dawkins puts it: "examples of memes are tunes, ideas, catch-phrases, clothes fashions, ways of making pots or of building arches. Just as genes spread themselves by leaping from body to body [generation to generation] via sperms or eggs, so memes propagate themselves in the meme pool by leaping from brain to brain via a process

which, in the broad sense, can be called imitation." Memes can be simple units like catch-phrases or they can be complex systems of thought like philosophical, political, or religious systems.

In Extropy we are interested in information and how it is produced, propagated, and increased. Any approach that may be able to increase our understanding of this process and which may help us spread extropian ideas is important to us and so we want to explore the possibilities raised by the memetic approach. A few articles have been written analyzing, for example, the historically powerful memes of Christianity and Marxism, but it is a new field just waiting to be developed. We are willing to print not only memetic analyses but also evaluations of the approach itself. Some have doubts about the utility of this approach so we will look at questions such as: is the parallel with genes a close enough one to make it productive to apply the principles of transmission genetics to memes? Does it matter that genes are physical while ideas are abstract? The understanding that such research in memetics provides will hopefully help us to spread the extropian meme itself. (MTO)

AESTHETICS

We all know how beauty delights our senses and stimulates our intellects, how we long to possess it and become beautiful ourselves. But what *is* beauty? That's a question for aesthetics, the study of the nature of beauty. Clearly, if we are to enjoy our future lives to the fullest potential, we must master the principles of aesthetics. After all, we don't just want to live long - we want to live well, too! By revealing beauty's underlying principles, aesthetics will allow us to reproduce it at will.

Aesthetics is a particularly relevant subject for Extropy because beauty is a property particular to transmissions of information. Art - be it painted, sung, danced or otherwise - serves as a means of communication from artist to spectator. Some artists succeed in imparting their messages with something we particularly value: beauty. Could this be efficiency of information transmission, or memetic survivability? Extropy will investigate these and other possible definitions of beauty as it both discusses aesthetics and serves as a lab for art experiments. (TWB)

MORALITY OR REALITY?

By Max T. O'Connor

"There are no moral phenomena at all, only a moral interpretation of phenomena." Friedrich Nietzsche, *"Beyond Good and Evil."*

I am going to argue that not only is morality something that we have good reason to reject, but that an amoralist viewpoint is especially fitting for Extropians. Don't be put off by the apparently radical nature of my thesis - you may end up finding it to be not only convincing but attractive and liberating! To begin, I will explain why I have come to dislike morality, then I will go on to give what I believe are solid theoretical reasons for rejecting any objectivist view of ethics (that is, any view which states that morals are objectively right or wrong, or actions objectively good or bad), and I will finish the main part of the paper by going beyond subjectivist ethics to an amoralist position.

The Faults of Moralities

Apart from the fact (as argued below) that moralities have no basis in reality, there are at least four objectionable features of moralities. Firstly, they are almost universally harmful to human happiness; secondly, they falsify one's perception of reality; thirdly, they frequently stand in the way of new ideas and new technologies; and fourthly, moralities result in wars, oppression, maliciousness, violence, emotional suffering and many other stupidities. I will only sketch my reasoning here since these are not my major theoretical points and a full argument for these views would require much space. My main reason for explaining these four items is to make evident the motivation for this article and its place in Extropy.

(1) It should be clear that many moral systems have deleterious effects on human happiness. Traditional religious moralities, such as those of Christianity, Islam, and Hinduism, have little concern for happiness, pleasure, or worldly success. They are more concerned with forcing the follower to obey God's will - as represented by his agents on Earth of course. These moralities can have devastating emotional effects, especially when they include notions of original sin, eternal punishment, guilt for wrong thoughts and feelings (which are largely involuntary), and a

downgrading of the proper role of reason and evidence in our lives. Such religions often say that sex is evil, that enjoyment is sinful or at least very suspicious, and that life is about service to God and not about happy, successful living here and now. More modern moral systems, such as utilitarianism (which tells one to maximize the total pleasure or satisfaction in society) are more oriented towards producing happiness, yet they still demand that the individual sacrifice him- or herself whenever this is necessary according to the morality.

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**"Moralities falsify
one's perception
of reality."**

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(2) Moralities falsify one's perception of reality by forcing one's thinking into an artificial and abstract framework that is not derived from considerations of the nature of the empirical world and the psychology of human beings. It is true that some ethical systems such as those of Aristotle, David

Hume, and Ayn Rand - try to base themselves in human nature and the conditions of the actual world. And yet even these systems, superior as they are to the Kantian approach, still invoke fixed categories and set up hard principles, which tend to lead one to deny facts in order to fit one's preconceptions. A clear example of this trend is evident in the bizarre behavior and reasoning of many of the followers of Ayn Rand's "Objectivism" despite its being the most self-consciously reality-bound moral system around.

(3) Given the previous point, it's not surprising to see the typically constraining effect that moralities have had throughout history on the invention, propagation, use, and acceptance of new ideas and new technologies. Just consider the opposition of Christian moralists to the use of anaesthetics that caused so much unnecessary suffering in the nineteenth century. Consider the opposition to surrogate parenting - a practice that offers clear gains to human happiness, and to biotechnology and genetic engineering. It's not just the conservatives that use their morality to suppress experiment and innovation; the so-called liberals want to control, regulate, and often discourage the introduction of new drugs, ideas, and technologies. One of the latest attacks on progress has been the assault on cryonics in concert with ridiculous moral accusations. Some people are determined to stop space exploration on the grounds that we have a duty to devote ourselves to the worst off on Earth first (exactly why this is a bad idea deserves an article in itself).

(4) Wars have many causes but one very important factor is the blindness to reality caused by moral systems. Throughout the world you can find people fighting over differences in their religions and their ways of life. Nazi Germany was the end product of a long history of moral and metaphysical philosophy starting with Plato, and including Hegel, Kant, and Marx. It was because of certain moral ideas about the necessity of promoting the Race at the expense of non-Aryans that Hitler and his gang invaded other countries and made necessary the choice of war or surrender to oppression. people will do all kinds of stupid and malicious things if they believe that what they are doing is morally required of them; this may mean killing or torturing the infidel, it may mean burning books, stopping people from accessing certain types of information, making themselves and others suffer negative emotions, or simply wasting time and resources in pursuing pointless aims which have no basis outside an artificial moral system.

Why There is no Objective Morality

In explaining why there can be no such thing as an objective morality I want to first explain what I mean by that, distinguish different types of morality and show what is wrong with them, and finally adduce some reasons why no morality can claim objective validity. By an "objective morality" I mean a view that there is one correct set of moral principles, that questions of right and wrong, good and bad, are fundamentally the same as questions in the sciences. A proponent of objective ethics believes that certain values and principles can be proven to be the correct ones and that it is not a matter of personal preference or opinion. Such a person, to take one example, might say that it is objectively immoral to have an abortion and that anyone who disagreed was simply wrong. Now there is more than one general type of ethical theory and they have different ways of trying to ground their putative objectivity. I will look at consequentialist (or teleological) approaches, formalist (or deontological) approaches, and religious moralities (which are either consequentialist or formalist in structure).

Religious moralities attempt to base their view of good and bad, right and wrong, on the will of God. The idea is that that which is good is what God says should be done, that which is bad is that which God forbids. The problem with this is that if an action is good simply because God says so (presumably because God is good) then it reduces God's goodness to triviality; God's goodness is then nothing more than God's liking himself the way he is. Furthermore, as J.L. Mackie says (in *Ethics: Inventing Right and*

Wrong, Penguin Books 1977), "It would also seem to entail that obedience to moral rules is merely prudent but slavish conformity to the arbitrary demands of a capricious tyrant." Because of this many religious thinkers (notably St. Thomas Aquinas) have abandoned this idea and asserted that morality has a basis independently of God. This leaves them with the task of explaining exactly what basis morality has.

Whether attached to a religion or not, a foundation for ethics may be sought in a formalist approach such as that of Immanuel Kant. Formalist approaches are sometimes extremely complicated since they have to desperately find some way of seeming to provide foundations for moral judgements. Formalist

"Moralities
have no basis
in reality."

moralities, as their name implies, lay down a system of rules to be followed in all circumstances. These rules are generated from some abstract consideration and have no real connection with anyone's wants, desires, preferences, or commitments. You will be asked to sacrifice your desires, values, and plans in order to conform to the dictates of a formalist ethics. I have never come across any argument for a formalist ethics that I found remotely plausible (unlike the case of consequentialist ethics) though I cannot here examine any one of them. My general criticisms below of objectivism will suffice. I highly recommend the Treatment by Ayn Rand of the absurdity and reality evasion of such theories in her book *Philosophy: Who Needs It*.

Consequentialist or naturalist approaches to objectively grounding ethics are also universal failures. These theories define the good as some thing that is to be maximized - such as total human happiness, or preferences, or tell us to minimize suffering, or say that we should act in accordance with "our nature" which, in Aristotle's case meant exercising one's talents and using one's rationality. Naturalistic and consequentialist ethics have an advantage over formalist theories in that they are more nearly tied to reality. Utilitarian calculations of consequences, for instance, at least make one look at the real world with some care rather than merely choosing one of a set of formal principles. Nevertheless no theory of this form can objectively ground ethics. One reason for this was explained by the great 18th Century Scottish philosopher David Hume when he showed that there is a fundamental distinction between facts and values. No matter what facts you point to, there is no logical constraint on someone which forces them to say that something is good or bad. It is true that this person suffers when I hurt him, but there is nothing in that fact which forces me to hold

the infliction of pain to be morally wrong rather than morally neutral or right. Rather than develop Hume's point in detail I will go on to make general critical points against the possibility of any system of ethics - whether formal or consequentialist - being susceptible of an objective grounding.

The Arguments From Oddness and Relativity

The argument from relativity is based on the obvious variation in the moral codes found in different ages, different societies, and different cultural groups and individuals within a society. Such variations do not, in themselves, prove the relativity of moral values of course. Yet the existence of such widespread differences in moral beliefs make it hard to take seriously the idea that people are just perceiving moral truths in an unclear and confused manner. There is much disagreement at the frontiers of science (though also a continually growing amount of agreement as more areas are deeply explored) but this is because science, when it ventures into relatively new territory, consists of speculative theoretical conjectures and inferences about what is objectively the case based on currently inadequate evidence and testing. It is implausible to construe moral theorizing in the same way for it has been around for thousands of years - what more evidence could turn up to decide these value issues? It seems rather that moral disagreements result not from poor perceptions of an objective realm of values but are absorbed from existing cultures. Thus monogamy is thought to be right because people are raised in a monogamous culture. There are moral reformers and heretics but their views are usually best explained as their belief that the new view is a more consistent extension of existing ethical conceptions.

The argument from oddness is even more telling than the argument from relativity and consists of an epistemological and a metaphysical part. (For those unfamiliar with philosopher's terminology, metaphysical refers to the study of what kinds of things exist and in what way, while epistemology studies how we know what exists and the conditions for knowledge or rational belief). Metaphysically, objective values would be odd because they would be entities, relations, or qualities of a type unlike anything else that we know of. Because of this we would require some very strange and puzzling means of knowledge to be able to apprehend objective values. We would need some faculty of knowledge other than the senses, reason, and logic which we use for everything else. Many objectivist moralists do not care for G.E. Moore's "non-natural qualities" and his "faculty of moral intuition" and yet they seem to be committed to these if any sense is to be made of objective morality.

The kind of thing that is needed for objective ethics is something like Plato's theory of Forms. Knowledge of the Form of the Good both tells the person who knows the good to pursue it and makes him pursue it. An objective goodness would be something that people had to promote once they recognized it simply because it was the good and not because someone wanted or desired the things that goodness was attached to. The oddness of these objective values can be further brought out by asking how it could be that objective moral goodness could be linked with any natural object that 'has' that goodness. What exactly is the connection between an action causing unnecessary pain and it being wrong? There is no logical connection here, and we do not sense something that we know to be the property of goodness and then sense its connection to the action. Yet there is supposed to be some kind of connection between them. What could this possibly be? The situation is more much simple and more comprehensible if we do away with objective moral values and replace them with subjective responses which are causally related to one's noticing certain features of an action or situation.

"Amoralism is
not the same
as egoism."

There are a number of reasons why people tend to objectify their subjective values, but we needn't go into those here. Let us just recognize the fact that values have their basis in individuals - moral values are simply people's desires and preferences even if they themselves don't recognize this. At

this point we seem to be left with a conclusion of moral subjectivism. I have no really strong arguments that can intellectually force anyone to go beyond subjectivism to amoralism; my arguments will only appeal to those who share some of my own subjective values. Some of those values are evident from the way in which I began this article. If you also favor liberty, peace, opportunity, diversity, increased information, and rationality, then amoralism should have some appeal for you. Amoralism does not deny the existence of (subjective) moralities. It is merely an attitude towards all of them. It's an attitude which says: NO THANKS! Let me first make it clear that an amoralist is not someone who rejects all principles of personal conduct. It is not an attitude which says "Do whatever you feel like at any time". That is not amoralism but rather a type of behavioral nihilism,

It should also be stressed that amoralism is not the same as egoism (whether narrow, broad, enlightened, or Aristotelian). Egoism is itself a moral system and imposes strict restrictions on the behavior of individuals. For a well worked out egoist morality (which claims to be objectively true) see Ayn Rand's *The Virtue of Selfishness*. Although I have long been inclined to a form of egoism myself and have found it difficult to see how anyone could be attached to any other moral system, I now think that there is no more reason to accept an egoistic ethics than any other if it does not suit your overall set of values, goals, desires, preferences, and projects. It is still the case for me, however, that egoism does pretty efficiently fit my preferences and projects and so I continue to use it as a guideline, but I am now aware of the danger inherent in any moral system, subjective or not. My projects and fundamental preferences may change so that egoism becomes an encumbrance rather than an aid. If, fundamentally, you don't want to act egoistically then there is no reason why you should. Of course I could point out that you might die, or suffer physical or emotional pain which you wouldn't if you continued to be an egoist, but these points could only have force for someone who already valued those things.

"Amorality is
a view whose
time has come"

Amoralism, then, does allow one to have principles regulating personal conduct, and they can be as simple or as complex as one wishes. An amoralist will find it productive to look over the many moral systems that have been invented (this being the correct term!) over the centuries and pick

and choose as he or she sees fit. Mixing moral systems will be tricky if you are mixing internally consistent but mutually contradictory systems since you will end up with a system that, being self-contradictory, is not very useful. Beyond that consideration though, it makes good sense to construct a system that best reflects your values. The amoralist always leaves his system open for future revisions and corrections as he inevitably changes. A set of principles to regulate one's behavior has utility only if it makes day to day decision-making easier. You don't want to have to work out what to do from first principles every time - a set of principles allows you to maximize the efficiency with which you pursue and realize your subjective values and preferences.

An amoralist is not likely to be interested in building guilt into his system. Guilt is a self-punishing emotional response based on a belief that one has done a "bad" thing. It is counterproductive and unpleasant, and it

makes one vulnerable to manipulation by others (which is why Christianity encourages it so). The amoralist is likely to reject guilt and replace it with remorse. Remorse contains no element of self-hate or self-pity. It is an open recognition that one acted against one's more important values and preferences, either by mistake or due to weakness of will, and it involves an eagerness to make amends and to work to prevent a recurrence of the mistaken behavior. Remorse, as opposed to guilt, obviously has a place in an amoralists system since it acts as a regulator of behavior which helps the individual to do what he most deeply wants to do.

Amoralism is a view whose time has come. Old moralities have created innumerable miseries for individuals and societies. Moralities, even if held subjectively, threaten to twist the rapidly approaching vastly powerful new technologies in a destructive direction or to slow their introduction. Since I have a strong interest in seeing those technologies come about as soon as possible and with no distortion from moralities blind to the facts of reality, one of my values is to promote amoralism, to explain its benefits, and to refute the myth of morality. I hope you will join me in rejecting morality in favor of reality.

"The learned judge correctly that people of all ages have believed that they KNOW what is good or evil, praise- and blameworthy. But it is a prejudice of the learned that WE KNOW BETTER than any other age." Friedrich Nietzsche, Daybreak.

THINGS TO COME

An appreciation of H. G. Wells' greatest speech, by Max O'Connor.

H. G. Wells wrote some very extropian stories - stories of mankind using intelligence, courage, and perseverance to overcome the obstacles of Man and nature to achieve new heights. His characters were dynamic, brilliant figures who were determined to eradicate ignorance, to discover new

truths, and to use technology to better themselves and the human race. These are goals and values that we approve of. One beautiful expression of the extropian vision comes at the conclusion of the film *Things To Come*. The great scientist, Cabal, and his group are being pursued by a mob of entropic fools who want to prevent the launch of the first moon mission. The heroes reach the 'space gun' and manage to fire it just in time, sending Cabal's daughter and Passworthy's son into space. Here is the concluding piece of dialogue which we fully endorse (apart from the implication that individuals have to die - a failure of thought on Wells' part):

Cabal watches the mirror intently, then cries to Passworthy:

"There - there they go! That faint gleam of light."

"I feel that what we've done is monstrous."

"What we've done is magnificent."

"Will they come back?"

"Yes. And go again and again, until a landing is made and the moon is conquered. This is only a beginning."

"If they don't come back - my son and your daughter - what of that Cabal?"

"Then, presently, others will go."

"Oh, God, is there never to be an age of happiness? Is there never to be any rest?"

"Rest enough for the individual man - too much, and too soon, and we call it Death. But for Man no rest and no ending. He must go on, conquest beyond conquest. First this little planet with its winds and ways, and then all the laws of mind and matter that restrain him. Then the planets about him, and at last out across immensity to the stars. And when he has conquered all the deeps of space and all the mysteries of time, still he will be beginning."

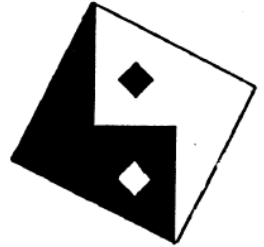
"But...we're such little creatures. Poor humanity's so fragile, so weak. Little...little animals."

"Little animals. If we're no more than animals we must snatch each little scrap of happiness and live and suffer and pass, mattering no more than all the other animals do or have done."

Cabal points to the image of space in the mirror. "It is this - or that: all the universe or nothingness. Which shall it be, Passworthy? Which shall it be?"



Triptych:



Yin Yin-Yang, Yin-Yang Yin-Yang, and Yang Yin-Yang
(TWB)

EXTROPY

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