

Postnihilism

A New Philosophy for the 21st Century

Introduction

Nihilism is a philosophy that denies the existence of meaning, purpose, or value in the world. It is a mindset that is characterized by a belief in the ultimate futility of all human endeavors and a despairing acceptance of the inherent meaningless of life. In our modern world, nihilism is a pervasive and growing problem, manifesting itself in the form of social upheaval, violence, and despair.

In this book, we will be exploring the concept of nihilism and its impact on our world today. We will also be introducing the idea of postnihilism, a philosophical and social movement that offers a solution to the problems caused by nihilism. Postnihilism is the assertion that "Life is intrinsically valuable." This may seem like a simple and straightforward statement, but it is actually a complex and multifaceted idea that takes time to unpack and explore.

Postnihilism has deep roots in shamanic and Eastern traditions such as Taoism, Buddhism, and Zen. Many indigenous cultures around the world, including Amazonian tribes who use ayahuasca and Mesoamerican shamanic traditions that utilize psilocybin and peyote, have long understood the intrinsic value of life and the importance of living in harmony with the natural world. In this book, we will be drawing upon these ancient wisdom traditions as we explore the concept of postnihilism and how it can be applied in our modern world.

Our main argument is two-fold: first, that nihilism is the primary problem facing the world today, and second, that we can choose postnihilism and that it is a major solution to these problems. To this end, we will be discussing the "Four Abandonments" that we identify as the primary drivers of nihilism: childhood abandonment, social abandonment, cosmic abandonment, and self abandonment. We will explore how these abandonments contribute to the rise and prevalence of nihilism and how they manifest in our world today, particularly in the form of tragedies such as the Holocaust, Russia, and China, as well as in the form of deaths from despair such as suicide, alcoholism, and drug addiction.

The rapid rise of artificial intelligence (AI) has forced us to ask important questions about our identity and conscience. Who gets to decide right and wrong for the machines? How do we define consciousness? The existence of machine intelligence represents a potential threat to our way of life, but it also represents a crisis of identity and conscience. As the author, I delved into philosophy while studying the Orthogonality Thesis, which posits that machine intelligence and utility functions are uncorrelated. However, the "ought from is" problem remains unsolved, and therein lies the solution. We can decide what ought to be regardless of what is. In this

sense, we agree with nihilism: we are free to choose whatever we wish. So we may choose postnihilism.

In the second half of the book, we will delve into the concept of postnihilism and how it offers a solution to the problems caused by nihilism. We will discuss the benefits of postnihilism for individuals and society, including how it can lead to greater happiness, fulfillment, and well-being, as well as how it can promote social harmony and cooperation. We will also examine the role of art, literature, and popular culture in promoting postnihilistic values and ideals, and consider the ways in which the climate crisis is driving the need for a new way of thinking about our place in the world. We will address potential objections or challenges to the idea of postnihilism and explore how postnihilistic principles can be applied in different areas of life, such as in education, politics, or business. By the end of the book, we hope to provide a clear and compelling case for the value and importance of postnihilism in our modern world.

Part 1: The Nihilistic Crisis

Chapter 1: The Four Abandonments

Nihilism has a long history, dating back to ancient Greek philosophers such as Epicurus and Democritus. In more recent times, nihilism has been associated with figures such as Friedrich Nietzsche, who argued that the decline of traditional values and beliefs had created a "crisis of meaning" in modern society.

However, while nihilism may have a rich intellectual history, we argue that it is not a valid moral or philosophical position. Rather, we see nihilism as a symptom of a sick society, one that has abandoned certain fundamental values and principles. In this section, we will be discussing the "Four Abandonments" that we identify as the primary drivers of nihilism: childhood abandonment, social abandonment, cosmic abandonment, and self abandonment.

Childhood abandonment refers to the ways in which modern society has failed to provide children with the love, support, and guidance that they need to thrive. This can manifest in various forms, such as excessive screen time and the rapidly rising loneliness experienced by many teens and young adults.

Social abandonment refers to the ways in which society has become increasingly isolated and disconnected from one another. This can be due to cultural changes, such as the rise of social media and other forms of digital communication, as well as the lack of social safety nets in many countries, particularly in the United States.

Cosmic abandonment refers to the decline in traditional religious belief and the crisis of faith that many people are experiencing. This can be seen in the rapid decline in church attendance and the growing sense of meaninglessness and purposelessness that many people feel.

Self abandonment is the final abandonment, and it refers to the ways in which individuals engage in self-destructive behaviors such as addiction and other forms of self-sabotage. These behaviors can be seen as a way of coping with the sense of meaninglessness and purposelessness that nihilism can create.

In the rest of this section, we will be exploring each of these abandonments in greater detail, discussing how they contribute to the rise and prevalence of nihilism in our modern world and providing examples of how they manifest in different areas of society.

Chapter 2: The Rise of Nihilism in the 20th Century

The 20th century was marked by numerous tragedies and atrocities that were, at their heart, nihilistic in nature. These events were fueled by nihilistic ideologies that rejected the value of human life and sought to destroy those who were deemed undesirable or inconvenient. The rise of nihilism in the 20th century was driven by a variety of factors, including economic and political instability, disillusionment following World War I, and cultural and social movements that celebrated anarchy and rejection of authority.

One of the most striking examples of the impact of nihilism in the 20th century was the rise of fascism in Nazi Germany. The Nazi regime was fundamentally nihilistic, as it did not value the lives of certain groups of people and was willing to engage in mass murder and genocide in order to achieve its goals. The Holocaust, in which an estimated six million Jews were murdered, was the most extreme manifestation of this nihilistic ideology.

Nihilism also emerged and flourished in the Soviet Union under the leadership of Joseph Stalin. Stalin's regime embraced nihilism in the form of brutal repression and violence, in order to maintain its grip on power. Stalin's policies resulted in the deaths of millions of people, including political opponents, minority groups, and those deemed undesirable or inconvenient. The Cultural Revolution in China, which was characterized by widespread violence and repression, was also driven by nihilistic ideals.

Latin America also saw the rise of nihilistic regimes in the 20th century, such as that of Argentine dictator Jorge Rafael Videla, who oversaw a regime of state terrorism that resulted in the deaths of an estimated 30,000 people. In Cambodia, the nihilistic regime of the Khmer Rouge led to the deaths of an estimated 1.7 to 2.2 million people.

Nihilism was not confined to dictatorial regimes in the 20th century, however. It was also embraced by certain countercultural movements, such as the punk scene, which celebrated anarchy and rejection of authority. In the United States, the Red Scare and the Cold War were fueled in part by nihilistic ideologies, as each side sought to undermine and destroy the other.

Nihilistic ideas were also embraced by certain philosophical and literary movements, such as existentialism and the Theater of the Absurd. These movements reflected the disillusionment and despair that marked the 20th century, and rejected traditional values and beliefs in favor of a more cynical and nihilistic worldview.

The impact of nihilism in the 20th century has been far-reaching and enduring. The struggles of the century cannot be reduced to a simple binary of East vs West or Democracy vs Communism, but rather were between life and death, between nihilism and postnihilism. The tragedies of the 20th century were fundamentally nihilistic crises, and it is only by understanding this that we can hope to move beyond them and towards a more positive and meaningful future.

Nihilism continues to be a pervasive problem in the world today, as seen in the rise of extremist movements, the proliferation of mass shootings, and the increasing rates of suicide.

and addiction. It is crucial that we understand the root causes of nihilism and take steps to combat it, in order to create a more positive and meaningful future for ourselves and future generations.

Chapter 3: Childhood Abandonment

Childhood abandonment and trauma can have a profound impact on an individual's worldview and behavior later in life. The psychological effects of childhood trauma, such as increased risk of developing mental health issues or engaging in self-destructive behaviors, can shape an individual's sense of self and their relationships with others.

One of the most striking examples of the impact of childhood abandonment can be seen in the case of some of the worst despots of the 20th and 21st centuries. Stalin, Hitler, Pol Pot, and Mao Zedong all experienced significant trauma and hardship in their childhoods, which may have contributed to their nihilistic worldviews.

Joseph Stalin, leader of the Soviet Union from 1922 to 1953, grew up in poverty and experienced the deaths of several family members, including his father. Stalin's early life was marked by hardship and trauma, which may have played a role in his later development of a nihilistic worldview.

Adolf Hitler, leader of Nazi Germany from 1933 to 1945, also experienced significant trauma in his childhood. Hitler's mother died when he was a young boy, and he later struggled with poverty and rejection. These experiences may have contributed to Hitler's later embrace of nihilistic ideologies and the atrocities committed during his time in power.

Pol Pot, leader of the Khmer Rouge regime in Cambodia from 1975 to 1979, experienced a violent and tumultuous childhood, including the loss of his mother and the trauma of war. These experiences may have shaped his later embrace of nihilistic ideologies and the resulting atrocities committed under his regime.

Mao Zedong, leader of the People's Republic of China from 1949 to 1976, also experienced significant trauma in his childhood, including the loss of his mother and exposure to violence and conflict. These experiences may have contributed to Mao's later development of a nihilistic worldview and the resulting tragedies of the Cultural Revolution.

Childhood abandonment can range from profound cases, such as the dictators mentioned above, to more common and mundane examples, such as broken homes and alcoholic or absentee parents. The impact of childhood abandonment can be seen in the rise of authoritarian regimes, as well as other major tragedies and crises of the 20th and 21st centuries. For instance, individuals who engage in mass shootings or other forms of violence often have histories of childhood trauma and abandonment. In fact, research has shown that individuals who have experienced childhood trauma are more likely to engage in violent behaviors later in life. This suggests that addressing childhood abandonment and trauma is a key factor in preventing violence and tragedy.

Even mild forms of childhood emotional neglect (CEN) can lead to feelings of worthlessness and pointlessness, which can contribute to the development of a nihilistic worldview. A 2020 metastudy conducted by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) found that 18% of people

experience CEN, but the actual number may be much higher due to underreporting. CEN can occur when a child's emotional needs are not adequately met by their caregivers, leading to feelings of isolation and disconnection. These feelings can persist into adulthood and contribute to a sense of meaninglessness and lack of purpose.
(<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7589986/>)

The prevalence of CEN highlights the insidious and pervasive nature of nihilism, as it can take root even in individuals who have not experienced extreme trauma or hardship. This underscores the importance of addressing CEN and other forms of childhood abandonment, as they can have far-reaching consequences for individuals and society as a whole. By addressing these issues and promoting values such as empathy, compassion, and respect for all life, we can work to prevent the spread of nihilistic ideologies and behaviors.

Childhood abandonment can also have intergenerational effects, as individuals who experienced trauma and abandonment in their own childhoods may be more likely to pass these experiences down to the next generation. This cycle of trauma can be difficult to break, but by understanding the role of childhood abandonment in driving nihilistic ideologies and behaviors, we can work to prevent these issues from taking hold and causing further harm.

One way to address childhood abandonment and trauma is through early intervention and support. By providing children with the care and support they need during their formative years, we can help to prevent the negative impacts of childhood trauma from taking hold. This can include providing access to quality education, mental health services, and supportive environments. It can also involve addressing societal issues that contribute to childhood abandonment, such as poverty, discrimination, and violence.

In addition to addressing childhood abandonment and trauma at an individual level, it is also important to consider the broader social and cultural context in which these issues occur. By creating a society that values and supports all individuals, regardless of their background or circumstances, we can help to prevent the rise of nihilistic ideologies and behaviors. This includes promoting values such as empathy, compassion, and respect for all life, which are at the heart of postnihilism.

Chapter 4: Social Abandonment

Throughout history, societies have always relied on social connections and a sense of community to thrive. In the 20th and 21st centuries, however, there has been a significant shift towards social abandonment and individualism in many parts of the world. This trend is exemplified by the rise of neoliberalism and the "sink or swim" mentality, as well as the belief in "rugged individualism" and the idea that one must rely solely on their own strength and resources.

This shift towards social abandonment has been fueled by a number of factors, including cultural and social changes, as well as economic and monetary changes. For example, the rise of neoliberalism and the reduction of social safety nets have led to a focus on individual responsibility and a "crab mentality" of "winner takes all." This belief that life is a zero-sum game, where there must be winners and losers, can contribute to a sense of isolation and competition, rather than collaboration and community.

Neoliberalism is an economic doctrine that emphasizes the importance of free markets and individual liberty. It is based on the belief that the best way to achieve economic growth and prosperity is to allow individuals to pursue their own self-interest without interference from the state. This is often achieved through the implementation of policies such as deregulation, privatization, and free trade.

One of the key ideas underlying neoliberalism is that an individual's worth and liberty are closely tied to their economic status. Under this belief system, a person's personhood is largely determined by their ability to be productive and contribute to the economy. This can create a sense of pressure and competition, as people feel the need to constantly prove their value and worth through their productivity.

This emphasis on individualism and competition can lead to a society that is more divided and less supportive of those who may be struggling. It can also contribute to a sense of social abandonment, as people may feel that they are on their own and must fend for themselves in a dog-eat-dog world. In this way, neoliberalism can be seen as a contributing factor to the rise of nihilism and the erosion of social connections.

Even if people do not explicitly believe in the idea of "rugged individualism," it is often implicitly baked into the zeitgeist, particularly in societies with Protestant or Calvinist roots, which tie economic wellbeing to spiritual wellbeing and view poverty as "sinful." This belief can lead to a focus on self-reliance and a rejection of community and social support.

Nihilism also plays a role in the trend towards social abandonment. The belief that life has no inherent meaning or value can lead to a focus on self-interest and a rejection of authority or community. This belief can feed into a sense of social abandonment and individualism, as people feel that they cannot rely on others for support or that the world is fundamentally hostile or meaningless.

The consequences of social abandonment can be significant and far-reaching. The decline in social connections and the rise of technology have contributed to a rise in loneliness and isolation, particularly among young people. The impact of social media and technology on social interactions has led to a decline in face-to-face interactions and an increase in online bullying and harassment. The lack of social support and connection can also contribute to feelings of worthlessness and hopelessness, leading to negative outcomes such as increased rates of mental health issues and substance abuse.

It is important to recognize that social abandonment is a vicious cycle, as it can reinforce and exacerbate feelings of childhood abandonment. When people feel disconnected and unsupported in their communities, they may be more likely to turn inward and focus on their own needs, rather than seeking support and connection with others. This can further contribute to feelings of isolation and a sense of being on one's own.

To combat the trend towards social abandonment, it is important to focus on building and strengthening social connections and communities. This can be done through various means, such as volunteering, participating in community organizations, and making an effort to connect with others face-to-face, rather than relying solely on technology for social interactions. By building strong and supportive communities, we can help to create a sense of belonging and purpose, and combat the destructive effects of nihilism and social abandonment.

Chapter 5: Cosmic Abandonment

One of the most profound forms of abandonment is the realization that we are alone in the universe, adrift in an uncaring and indifferent cosmos. This sense of cosmic loneliness can be deeply unsettling, as it strips away any illusions we may have had about our place in the world and our connection to something greater.

Scientific and technological advancements have played a significant role in our perception of the universe and our place within it. As we have come to understand more about the vastness of the cosmos and our own relative insignificance, we have also come to feel a sense of disconnection and isolation. The universe no longer seems like a welcoming and nurturing place, but rather a cold and empty void.

The decline of organized religion and the rise of atheism are also significant factors in the sense of cosmic abandonment that many people experience. As traditional sources of meaning and purpose have declined, many people have found themselves adrift in a void of uncertainty. This crisis of faith can be deeply unsettling, as it leaves us searching for answers in a seemingly meaningless and purposeless universe.

Art and literature have often explored the theme of cosmic abandonment, with works that portray the universe as a cold and empty place, or those that attempt to provide a sense of meaning and purpose in the face of cosmic loneliness. Science fiction is a particularly rich genre in this regard, as it often grapples with the question of our place in the universe and the possibility of other intelligent life.

Spirituality and mysticism offer another way of seeking connection with something greater than ourselves and finding meaning and purpose in the face of cosmic abandonment. These practices can take many forms, from traditional organized religions to more personal and intuitive spiritual practices. The search for extraterrestrial life is also driven in part by a desire to connect with something beyond ourselves and to find evidence that we are not alone in the universe.

The rise of alternative spiritual practices, such as neopaganism and shamanic traditions, can also be seen as a response to the perceived void left by mainstream religions. These practices offer a way of reconnecting with the natural world and finding meaning and purpose in the face of cosmic abandonment.

One way that cosmic abandonment echoes childhood abandonment is through the concept of deities or higher powers as parental figures. Throughout history, many religions have depicted their gods as having maternal or paternal energies, perhaps reflecting our deep-seated need for guidance and protection from a higher power. When these deities are perceived as absent or uncaring, it can lead to feelings of abandonment and a crisis of faith. This is evident in the decline of organized religion and the rise of atheism, as people turn away from traditional sources of meaning and purpose.

The search for extraterrestrial life can also be seen as a response to cosmic abandonment, as the possibility of discovering other intelligent beings offers the hope of connection and a sense of belonging in the vastness of the universe. Alternative spiritual practices, such as neopaganism and shamanic traditions, can also provide a sense of connection and meaning in the face of cosmic loneliness.

The psychological and emotional impact of cosmic abandonment on individuals and society cannot be underestimated. It can lead to feelings of hopelessness and despair, and contribute to nihilistic tendencies. Art and literature can play a role in addressing these feelings, with some works portraying the universe as cold and empty, while others offer a sense of meaning and purpose in the face of cosmic loneliness.

One way in which cosmic abandonment can be linked to both childhood and social abandonment is through the decline of organized religion and the rise of secularism. This trend, which has been observed in many Western societies in recent decades, can be seen as a manifestation of a broader crisis of faith and a rejection of traditional sources of meaning and purpose. At the same time, this trend has also been accompanied by a rise in nihilistic tendencies, as people struggle to find meaning and purpose in a world that seems increasingly cold and uncaring.

This connection between cosmic abandonment and the decline of religion has been noted by several prominent figures in the fields of philosophy and psychology. For example, the famous mythologist Joseph Campbell argued that the decline of religion in the modern world has created a sense of spiritual emptiness and a lack of meaning, leading people to search for alternative sources of meaning and purpose. Similarly, the psychologist Jordan Peterson has argued that the decline of religion has contributed to a crisis of meaning and purpose in modern society, and that this crisis is at the root of many of the problems facing the world today.

Another figure who has commented on this connection is Eugene Rose, a Russian Orthodox monk and philosopher who has written extensively on the topic of cosmic abandonment. In his writings, Rose argues that the decline of religion in the modern world is a reflection of a deeper spiritual crisis, and that this crisis is linked to a sense of cosmic loneliness and a lack of connection to something greater than ourselves. According to Rose, this sense of cosmic loneliness is at the root of many of the problems facing the world today, and it is only by addressing this crisis that we can hope to move beyond nihilism and towards a more positive and meaningful future.

In conclusion, cosmic abandonment is a deeply unsettling aspect of the human experience, as it touches on our fundamental need for connection and meaning in the face of an indifferent universe. It can echo the feelings of abandonment experienced in childhood, and contribute to nihilistic tendencies. While it is a daunting challenge, it is one that can be addressed through art, literature, spirituality, and the search for connection with something greater than ourselves.

Chapter 6: Self Abandonment

Self abandonment is the ultimate conclusion of the nihilistic crisis, as it represents the complete rejection of self-worth and meaning. It is a response to the various forms of abandonment that we have experienced throughout our lives, whether it be childhood abandonment, social abandonment, or cosmic abandonment. When we feel abandoned and alone, we may turn inward and begin to abandon ourselves in various ways.

One example of self abandonment is addiction. When we feel hopeless and disconnected from the world, we may turn to substances or behaviors as a way to numb the pain and fill the void. However, these coping mechanisms only serve to further distance us from ourselves and others, leading to a cycle of self-destructive behavior.

Another example of self abandonment is isolation. When we feel abandoned by society, we may withdraw from social connections and relationships, leading to feelings of loneliness and disconnection. This isolation can manifest in various forms, such as social media addiction or a lack of physical interaction with others.

Violence is another form of self abandonment, as it represents a complete rejection of the value of one's own life and the lives of others. When we feel abandoned and without purpose, we may lash out and harm ourselves or others in an attempt to feel some sense of control or agency.

Over-work is also a form of self abandonment, as it represents a complete focus on productivity and achievement at the expense of one's own well-being. When we feel abandoned and without meaning, we may throw ourselves into our work as a way to distract ourselves from the emptiness within.

Poor hygiene is another example of self abandonment, as it represents a lack of care for one's own physical and emotional well-being. When we feel abandoned and unworthy, we may neglect our own basic needs and self-care practices.

The consequences of self abandonment are severe and can have lasting impacts on both the individual and society. The rise in suicide rates, particularly among older men, is a stark example of the devastating effects of self abandonment. According to a report by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), suicide rates in the United States have increased by 35% since 1999, with the highest rates occurring among men aged 45 to 64. This trend is not unique to the United States, as similar increases in suicide rates have been reported in other countries as well.

Self abandonment can also manifest in other forms of self-destructive behavior, such as substance abuse and addiction. When individuals feel disconnected from their sense of self and purpose, they may turn to substances or behaviors as a coping mechanism, leading to further harm and destruction. Chronic over-work, which has become increasingly common in modern

society, can also be seen as a form of self abandonment, as individuals prioritize their work at the expense of their own well-being and relationships.

Self abandonment can also manifest in social isolation and loneliness, as individuals may feel disconnected and disconnected from others. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of social connections and the devastating effects of isolation, as many people have experienced increased feelings of loneliness and despair due to the lack of in-person interactions.

The cycle of abandonment can be difficult to break, as individuals who have experienced abandonment in their childhood or in their social relationships may be more prone to self abandonment. However, there are ways to break this cycle and find a sense of meaning and purpose in life. Seeking therapy or support from friends and loved ones can be helpful in addressing feelings of abandonment and finding ways to connect with oneself and others. Engaging in activities that bring a sense of meaning and purpose, such as volunteering or pursuing hobbies, can also be helpful in combating self abandonment.

It is important to recognize the signs of self abandonment and seek help when needed. By addressing the root causes of self abandonment, individuals can break the cycle of abandonment and find a sense of meaning and purpose in their lives.

Chapter 7: The Vicious Cycle

Throughout our exploration of nihilism, we have seen how it is deeply connected to various forms of abandonment, including childhood, social, and cosmic abandonment. We have also seen how these forms of abandonment can lead to feelings of worthlessness, despair, and hopelessness, which can in turn contribute to nihilistic tendencies.

Furthermore, we have observed how nihilism can be both a symptom and a cause of the problems we face as a society. It is a vicious cycle that echoes throughout history, as one generation's experiences of abandonment lead to nihilism, which in turn leads to further abandonment for the next generation.

This cycle can be seen in the rise of dictatorial regimes in the 20th century, fueled by economic and political instability, as well as the disillusionment and despair following World War I. We have also seen how social abandonment, in the form of a "sink or swim" mentality and a belief in the "crab mentality" of winner-takes-all, has contributed to the rise of neoliberalism and the erosion of safety nets.

Additionally, we have explored the role of cosmic abandonment in the decline of organized religion and the rise of atheism, as well as the psychological and emotional impacts of feeling isolated and disconnected in a vast and seemingly indifferent universe. This cosmic loneliness has also contributed to the rise of alternative spiritual practices, such as neopaganism and shamanic traditions, as people seek meaning and connection in the face of a cold and uncaring universe.

Finally, we have examined the ways in which self abandonment, in the form of addiction, isolation, violence, over-work, and poor hygiene, can be a reaction to nihilism and other forms of abandonment. The consequences of self abandonment are severe and can have lasting impacts on both the individual and society.

In conclusion, the nihilistic crisis that we are facing is a complex and multifaceted problem that is deeply rooted in various forms of abandonment. However, it is important to recognize that, despite how dire things may seem, there is a solution within reach. In the next section of this book, we will explore the concept of postnihilism and how it offers a way out of the vicious cycle of abandonment and nihilism.

Part 2: Postnihilism Manifesto

Chapter 8: Postnihilism Defined

Nihilism is a philosophical perspective that asserts that life is meaningless and purposeless. It is the belief that there is no inherent value or significance in the world, and that all values and beliefs are subjective and ultimately without foundation. While nihilism can be liberating in that it allows for the freedom to create our own meaning and purpose, it can also lead to a sense of despair and hopelessness, as it denies the possibility of finding meaning and purpose in the world.

Postnihilism, on the other hand, is a new philosophy and worldview that seeks to transcend nihilism by providing meaning, purpose, and value in the face of the Four Abandonments. As outlined in Part 1 of this book, the Four Abandonments are childhood abandonment, social abandonment, cosmic abandonment, and self abandonment. These four forms of abandonment lead to feelings of isolation, despair, and meaninglessness, and can ultimately contribute to a nihilistic mindset.

Postnihilism seeks to provide an alternative to nihilism by recognizing the inherent value and significance of all life. At the core of Postnihilism is the assertion that "all life is intrinsically valuable." This includes not only human life, but also the lives of animals, plants, and all forms of life on earth. Postnihilism affirms that there is meaning and purpose in the world, and that we can find it by recognizing and honoring the value of all life.

Postnihilism also differs from other philosophies such as Existentialism and Stoicism, which often focus on the individual's search for meaning and purpose in the face of an indifferent or hostile universe. While these philosophies can offer some comfort and guidance, they ultimately rely on the individual to find meaning and purpose on their own. Postnihilism, on the other hand, recognizes that meaning and purpose can be found through our connections to others and to the natural world. It promotes a sense of community and interconnectedness, rather than individualism and isolation.

In contrast to humanism and sentientism, which prioritize human or sentient life above all other forms of life, Postnihilism affirms the inherent value of all life and seeks to create a world in which all life can flourish. This includes not only humans and sentient beings, but also the natural world and the ecosystems that support all forms of life.

The need for a Postnihilistic perspective is particularly pressing in the face of the nihilistic crisis outlined in Part 1 of this book. The rise of nihilism, as well as the Four Abandonments, has contributed to a sense of despair and hopelessness in many people. By offering a way to find meaning and purpose in the face of these challenges, Postnihilism provides a much-needed alternative to nihilism.

One of the key challenges that nihilism poses is the "ought from is" problem. This problem refers to the idea that it is impossible to derive "what ought to be" from "what actually is". In other words, nihilism asserts that there is no inherent meaning or purpose in the world, and therefore we are free to choose anything as our "ought". While this may seem liberating, it also means that nihilism is an arbitrary choice, with no inherent justification for the values and beliefs that it promotes.

Postnihilism also recognizes that it is an arbitrary choice, but one that is grounded in the inherent value of all life. While the arbitrariness of nihilism is both a strength and a weakness, the arbitrariness of postnihilism is a strength, as it allows for the freedom to create a world that values and affirms all life. By choosing postnihilism, we are able to transcend the limitations of nihilism and create a world that is meaningful and purposeful.

In contrast to nihilism, which sees the universe as meaningless and purposeless, postnihilism recognizes that the universe is full of meaning and purpose, and that it is our job to discover and cultivate it. This is not to say that postnihilism is a naive or simplistic worldview; it recognizes that the world is complex and that life is full of suffering. However, it also recognizes that suffering is not the only or even the primary aspect of life, and that there are many sources of meaning and purpose in the world.

One key difference between nihilism and postnihilism is that nihilism is a passive worldview, while postnihilism is an active one. Nihilism sees the world as indifferent to our choices and actions, and therefore sees no point in trying to change it. In contrast, postnihilism recognizes that the world is shaped by our choices and actions, and therefore sees it as our responsibility to shape it in ways that are meaningful and purposeful. This means that postnihilism is not just a set of beliefs, but also a call to action. It is a call to embrace our agency and to use it to create a world that values and affirms all life.

Chapter 9: Origins of Postnihilism

Postnihilism has roots that stretch back to ancient spiritual traditions that emphasized the interconnectedness of all life and the importance of community. These traditions, which can be found in various cultures around the world, have long recognized the inherent value and worth of all beings and have sought to cultivate a sense of respect, reverence, and compassion towards all life.

Indigenous traditions such as those from Mesoamerica and South America, as well as Aboriginal Australia, often place a strong emphasis on the interconnectedness of all things and the importance of living in harmony with the natural world. These cultures often use shamanic traditions as a way to connect with the spirit world and to understand the oneness of all things. For example, in the shamanic traditions of the indigenous Quechua people of the Andes, the concept of "ayni" is central. Ayni translates to "reciprocal exchange" and refers to the idea that all things are connected and must be in balance in order for the world to function properly. This concept is reflected in the Quechua practice of "payka kawsay," or "good living," which involves living in harmony with the natural world and with one another. This emphasis on interconnectedness and balance is a key aspect of postnihilism, as it recognizes the inherent value of all life and the importance of living in harmony with the world around us.

Eastern spiritual traditions such as Taoism, Buddhism, and Shinto all emphasize the concept of radical acceptance of what is and an appreciation for the raw existence of life. These philosophies encourage a detachment from the ego and the acceptance of life's impermanence, teaching individuals to find meaning and purpose within themselves rather than external sources.

Taoism, for example, emphasizes the importance of living in harmony with the natural world and finding balance within oneself. It advocates for a non-dualistic approach to life, recognizing the interconnectedness of all things and the fluidity of existence.

Buddhism, on the other hand, teaches individuals to let go of desires and attachments, recognizing that suffering is often caused by the ego's attachment to things. Instead, Buddhism encourages the cultivation of mindfulness and compassion towards oneself and others.

Shinto, the indigenous religion of Japan, emphasizes the importance of living in harmony with nature and the spiritual energies present in the natural world. It teaches individuals to find meaning and purpose through living a virtuous life and performing rituals to honor and connect with the natural world and ancestral spirits.

Overall, these Eastern spiritual traditions offer a different perspective on the search for meaning and purpose, one that emphasizes acceptance of the present moment and finding purpose within oneself rather than external sources.

In the modern era, the concept of Postnihilism has been influenced by the grandiose view of existence put forth by scientists such as Charles Darwin, who argued that all life on earth is

connected through a common ancestry. This view of the interconnectedness of all life has been further elaborated upon by popular scientific communicators such as Richard Dawkins, Carl Sagan, Neil DeGrasse Tyson, and Brian Cox, who have helped to popularize the idea of the "cosmic perspective" and the awe-inspiring nature of the universe.

The 1960s saw the rise of the counterculture movement and the widespread use of psychedelics, which were often used as a means of exploring spiritual and philosophical concepts. Many of these psychedelic experiences were influenced by shamanic and indigenous traditions, which often involved the use of plant-based psychedelics as a means of inducing altered states of consciousness and exploring the nature of reality. These experiences played a significant role in the development of Postnihilism and the recognition of the interconnectedness of all life.

The 1960s and the psychedelic movement also played a significant role in the development of Postnihilism. The use of psychedelics, particularly LSD and psilocybin, as a means of spiritual and personal exploration was heavily influenced by indigenous and shamanic traditions. These practices helped to introduce the concept of interconnectedness and a more holistic view of the world to a wider audience. Many individuals who were involved in the psychedelic movement went on to become influential figures in the development of Postnihilism, including Terence McKenna, who popularized the concept of the "archaic revival" and the need for a radical shift in consciousness.

The origins of Postnihilism can also be traced to modern scientific communicators, who have emphasized the grandeur and awe-inspiring nature of the universe and our place within it. Charles Darwin, for example, spoke of the "grandeur in this view of life" in his theory of evolution, which posits that all living things are connected through a common ancestry. Similarly, Richard Dawkins has spoken of the "unfathomable mystery" of existence and the "mind-blowing immensity" of the universe.

Other scientific communicators, such as Neil DeGrasse Tyson and Carl Sagan, have also emphasized the wonder and mystery of the universe, and the importance of seeking out knowledge and understanding. In doing so, they have helped to cultivate a sense of awe and wonder at the world around us, and a recognition of the inherent value of life and the universe as a whole.

Even modern scientific fields, such as quantum physics and cosmology, have failed to fully explain the mystery of our existence and the origins of the universe. Despite this, we are here, irrepressible and obvious, a testament to the inherent value and mystery of life. This sense of wonder and mystery has been an important influence on the development of Postnihilism, as it recognizes the inherent value of life and the universe, and seeks to find meaning and purpose in the face of the Four Abandonments.

In conclusion, the origins of Postnihilism can be traced back to a variety of sources, including ancient spiritual traditions, indigenous cultures, and modern scientific understanding.

Whether one believes in Eastern spiritual traditions, ancient shamanic traditions, or modern science, the idea of Postnihilism fits in with a wide range of worldviews. It is a choice that we can all make, a choice to value and affirm all life, to embrace our interconnectedness, and to find meaning and purpose in the face of the Four Abandonments. By choosing Postnihilism, we can transcend the nihilistic crisis and create a world that is more meaningful, more connected, and more fulfilling for all.

Chapter 10: Practical Steps & Choices

Adopting a Postnihilistic mindset and addressing the Four Abandonments requires taking action in our daily lives. While the journey towards a postnihilistic worldview is a personal one, there are practical steps and choices that we can make to support and nurture this mindset.

One of the most important steps towards a Postnihilistic mindset is to prioritize self-care. This includes taking care of our physical, mental, and emotional health. This can involve activities such as exercise, meditation, and therapy, as well as making healthy choices in our daily lives, such as eating a nutritious diet and getting enough sleep. By taking care of ourselves, we are better able to care for others and be present in the world.

Another practical step towards a Postnihilistic mindset is to build supportive communities. This can involve joining groups or organizations that share our values and goals, or simply cultivating relationships with friends and family who support and encourage us. Building a network of supportive individuals can help us feel connected and supported, and can provide us with the resources and motivation to take action in the world.

In addition to self-care and building supportive communities, seeking out meaningful experiences and connections can also be an important step towards a Postnihilistic mindset. This can involve activities such as volunteering, participating in community events, or simply engaging in activities that bring us joy and purpose. By finding meaning and purpose in our lives, we can better cope with the challenges and struggles of life and feel more connected to the world around us.

Finally, exploring political, social, and economic choices that prioritize life and community over individualism and profit can also be a practical step towards a Postnihilistic mindset. This can involve supporting policies and initiatives that promote the well-being of all individuals, rather than just a select few. It can also involve making choices in our daily lives that prioritize the well-being of others, such as supporting local businesses and charities, rather than just pursuing our own self-interest.

Overall, the practical steps and choices that we make in our daily lives can play a significant role in shaping our worldview and mindset. By prioritizing self-care, building supportive communities, seeking out meaningful experiences and connections, and making choices that prioritize life and community, we can move towards a Postnihilistic mindset and work towards addressing the Four Abandonments. This can also include getting involved in activism and social justice movements. By advocating for marginalized and oppressed communities, we can work towards creating a more just and inclusive society that values all life. This can be as simple as signing petitions, attending protests and rallies, or volunteering with organizations that align with our values.

Additionally, individuals can work towards creating more sustainable and eco-friendly practices in their personal lives. This includes reducing our carbon footprint, supporting

businesses that prioritize environmental sustainability, and advocating for policies that protect the planet and its inhabitants.

Another important step in adopting a postnihilistic mindset is finding ways to cultivate compassion and empathy. This can involve practicing mindfulness and self-compassion, as well as actively seeking out opportunities to engage with and support others. This could mean volunteering at a homeless shelter, participating in a mentorship program, or simply being more present and attentive in our relationships with others.

The psychedelic renaissance, which has gained increasing popularity in recent years, has the potential to be a major contributor to the adoption of a postnihilistic mindset. The use of psychedelics, such as psilocybin and ayahuasca, has been shown to have a powerful impact on individuals' sense of connection to the world and to others. Many people report having profound spiritual experiences while under the influence of these substances, which can lead to a greater appreciation for the mystery and beauty of existence. This can be particularly important for individuals who have lost touch with their spiritual selves due to the Four Abandonments, as it can provide a means of reconnecting with the sacred and the divine.

Similarly, the neopagan reconstructionist movement has gained popularity in recent years, with many individuals seeking to reclaim and revitalize the spiritual practices of their ancestors. This can be especially important for those who have been abandoned by traditional religious institutions, as it provides a way to reconnect with the spiritual traditions of the past. Neopaganism often emphasizes a deep connection to nature and the natural world, which can be a powerful counterbalance to the nihilistic worldview that sees the world as meaningless and valueless. By reconnecting with their spiritual selves and the natural world, individuals can adopt a postnihilistic mindset that values and affirms all life.

One of the key ways in which individuals can adopt a postnihilistic mindset is by addressing and preventing childhood emotional neglect, abandonment, and trauma. This may involve providing a safe and supportive environment for children, being attentive to their emotional needs, and offering a sense of belonging and connection. By prioritizing the emotional well-being of children, we can help to lay the foundations for a postnihilistic worldview that values and affirms all life.

However, it is not always possible to completely prevent childhood adversity and trauma. When these experiences do occur, it is important to seek out treatment and support to mitigate their negative impact on the individual. This may involve therapy, support groups, or other forms of care and assistance. By addressing childhood adversity and trauma, individuals can better protect themselves from falling into a nihilistic mindset and instead embrace a postnihilistic perspective.

Ultimately, addressing and preventing childhood emotional neglect, abandonment, and trauma is crucial for helping individuals to adopt a postnihilistic mindset. By providing a safe and supportive environment for children, being attentive to their emotional needs, and seeking

out treatment and support when necessary, we can help to build a foundation for a postnihilistic worldview that values and affirms all life.

One way that individuals can make political and social choices that prioritize life and community over individualism and profit is by supporting policies and programs that promote social safety and security. This includes advocating for universal healthcare, affordable housing, and basic income programs that ensure that everyone has access to the resources and support they need to thrive. By supporting these kinds of policies, we can create a society that values and affirms all life, rather than one that leaves some people behind and exposes them to the risks and hardships of nihilism. This kind of political shift towards postnihilism represents a rejection of the individualistic and profit-driven mindset that underlies nihilism and instead embraces a worldview that recognizes the inherent value of all life and the importance of supporting and caring for one another. By supporting social safety programs, we can work towards creating a more postnihilistic society that values and affirms all life.

Finally, it is important to remember that adopting a postnihilistic mindset is a continuous process, and it requires consistent effort and self-reflection. This means taking the time to regularly assess our values and beliefs, and being open to learning and growing as individuals. It also means being kind to ourselves and recognizing that we are not perfect, and that it is okay to make mistakes and learn from them. By consistently striving towards a postnihilistic mindset, we can work towards creating a more meaningful and fulfilling life for ourselves and for others.

Chapter 11: The Postnihilistic Attitude

In order to fully understand the Postnihilistic attitude, it is important to first understand the forces that drive nihilism. The Four Abandonments - childhood abandonment, social abandonment, cosmic abandonment, and self abandonment - conspire to create a nihilistic mindset, one that is characterized by despair, hopelessness, and meaninglessness. These abandonments are driven by cultural, political, technological, spiritual, and economic trends, and their impact can be seen in the current nihilistic crisis - a quagmire of individual and cultural despair that is prevalent in our current society.

However, achieving a Postnihilistic mindset does not simply mean rejecting nihilism and moving in the opposite direction. It requires moving through the nihilistic crisis and coming out the other side, hence the name "Postnihilism."

Achieving a Postnihilistic attitude requires a fundamental shift in perspective, a spiritual, intellectual, and philosophical process that involves moving through the nihilistic crisis and embracing the inherent value of all life. This process involves developing resilience and compassion, a sense of responsibility to oneself and others, and the ability to find meaning and value in spite of the Four Abandonments. It is worth noting that nihilism is an arbitrary choice, with nothing intrinsically true or false about it. However, just as arbitrarily, we can choose to move beyond nihilism and adopt a postnihilistic perspective that affirms the inherent value of all life.

The Four Abandonments are the primary drivers of the nihilistic crisis. Childhood abandonment can take the form of emotional neglect, physical abuse, or other forms of trauma that can damage an individual's sense of self-worth and leave them feeling isolated and disconnected from others. Social abandonment refers to the ways in which society can fail to provide individuals with a sense of belonging and connection, whether through discrimination, isolation, or other forms of ostracization. Cosmic abandonment refers to the feelings of insignificance and meaninglessness that can arise from a lack of connection to a greater purpose or meaning in life. Finally, self abandonment refers to the ways in which individuals can turn against themselves, engaging in self-destructive behaviors or thoughts that undermine their own well-being and happiness.

Together, these Four Abandonments create a vicious cycle of intergenerational abandonment and trauma. Individuals who experience abandonment and trauma may be more prone to nihilistic thinking and behaviors, which can further perpetuate a sense of hopelessness and despair. This cycle can be difficult to break, but adopting a Postnihilistic attitude can provide a way out of this spiral of despair and into a more hopeful and meaningful way of living.

"Burning Everything Away" is a crucial step in the process of achieving a Postnihilistic attitude. It involves letting go of all preconceived notions and beliefs and facing the difficult truths of the world head-on. This process can be difficult, as it requires a willingness to confront the inherent mystery and uncertainty of existence. It may involve questioning long-held beliefs,

facing difficult emotions, and accepting that some things may never be fully understood. This process is essential, as it allows individuals to move beyond the nihilistic crisis and embrace a new perspective.

One way to approach this process is through self-inquiry and introspection. This may involve engaging in mindfulness practices, such as meditation or journaling, in order to better understand one's own beliefs and motivations. It may also involve seeking out new experiences and perspectives, such as traveling, reading, or engaging in meaningful conversations with others. The goal of this process is to get to the bottom of one's own nihilistic mindset and understand the root causes of it.

Another way to approach "burning everything away" is through seeking out support and guidance from others. This may involve seeking out therapy or joining a support group in order to process difficult emotions and experiences. It may also involve seeking out mentors or advisors who can offer a new perspective or provide guidance on the path towards a Postnihilistic attitude. Ultimately, the process of "burning everything away" is a personal journey that will look different for each individual. However, it is a crucial step in the process of moving beyond the nihilistic crisis and embracing a new perspective.

Moving through the nihilistic crisis and letting go of preconceived notions and beliefs is not an easy task. It requires time, effort, and a great deal of introspection and self-examination. It involves facing difficult truths and accepting the inherent mystery and uncertainty of existence. This process requires a level of awareness and attention to one's own thoughts and beliefs, as well as a willingness to challenge and let go of those that do not serve a positive, life-affirming purpose. Cultivating a postnihilistic attitude is similar to tending to a garden; it requires care, attention, and time to grow and flourish. By learning to recognize nihilism for what it is and actively cultivating a postnihilistic mindset, individuals can gradually transform their perspective and move beyond the nihilistic crisis towards a more meaningful and fulfilling life.

The mystery of existence is at the heart of postnihilism. While science and technology have given us a deeper understanding of the world around us, there are still many things that remain beyond our comprehension. From the origin of the universe and the emergence of consciousness, to the nature of subjective experience and the relationship between mind and matter, there are many deep and enduring mysteries that continue to elude us.

The Big Bang Theory explains the origin and evolution of the universe as we know it, but it does not attempt to address the question of "why" existence occurred in the first place. It is simply a characterization of the apparent sudden expansion of the universe from a singularity. Similarly, neuroscience has made great strides in understanding the brain structures and processes that participate in consciousness, but it does not attempt to explain the reason for our subjective experience of being. Despite our best scientific theories, we are still no closer to understanding the ultimate mystery of existence.

This is not to say that we should give up on asking these deep questions. In fact, it is through the continued exploration and questioning that we can move beyond nihilism and embrace a postnihilistic attitude. By acknowledging the inherent mystery and uncertainty of existence, we can let go of the need for concrete answers and instead focus on cultivating a sense of wonder and appreciation for the raw experience of being alive. This is the foundation of the postnihilistic attitude, and it is through this attitude that we can find meaning and value in spite of the inherent mystery of existence.

However, it is important to recognize that we may never fully understand these mysteries. This does not mean that we should give up, but rather that we should embrace the inherent uncertainty and mystery of existence. By accepting that there are some things that we may never fully understand, we can let go of the need for answers and instead focus on the present moment and the inherent value of all life. Live the questions, but accept the mystery. Not everything requires an explanation.

In order to fully embrace a postnihilistic attitude, it is necessary to let go of the idea that we can know everything or even that we should try to know everything. This process of radical acceptance involves acknowledging that some mysteries may always remain elusive and that this is a fundamental part of the human experience. It can be difficult to let go of the delusion that we have all the answers or that we can find them if we try hard enough, but it is a necessary step in moving beyond nihilism.

Embracing radical acceptance allows us to let go of our need to control and understand everything and instead adopt a posture of relaxed awe and wonder. Rather than remaining stuck in cynicism and despair, we can embrace a sense of curiosity and openness to new perspectives and experiences. This liberation from the need to know everything allows us to fully embrace the postnihilistic attitude and engage in new explorations and seek out new perspectives.

Radical acceptance involves fully acknowledging and accepting what is, rather than trying to change it or wish it to be different. This can be difficult, as it often requires acknowledging and accepting things that are difficult or painful. However, by practicing radical acceptance, we can let go of our resistance to the present moment and find peace and acceptance in what is. This process involves acknowledging and accepting our thoughts and feelings, rather than trying to suppress or change them. It also involves acknowledging and accepting the reality of a situation, rather than trying to deny or avoid it. Through radical acceptance, we can find a sense of peace and freedom, even in the face of difficult or challenging circumstances.

This process of radical acceptance is not easy and requires a willingness to confront and let go of deeply held beliefs and assumptions. It may involve facing difficult truths and coming to terms with the inherent mystery and uncertainty of existence. But by embracing radical acceptance and letting go of our need for certainty and control, we can free ourselves from the constraints of nihilism and embrace a postnihilistic attitude that values and affirms all life.

Relaxed awe is a state of being that is characterized by a sense of wonder and curiosity about the world, without the need for answers or explanations. It is a posture of acceptance and appreciation for the raw existence of things, rather than trying to fit them into preconceived notions or beliefs. To achieve this state, it is important to let go of the need for certainty and control, and instead embrace the inherent mystery and uncertainty of existence.

This state of relaxed awe comes when we adopt radical acceptance and combine it with a sense of curiosity. By letting go of our need for control and definitions, we are able to fully engage with the world as it is, without prejudice or preconception. This allows us to experience a sense of wonder and appreciation for all of existence, without the weight of despair or nihilism.

In conclusion, achieving a postnihilistic attitude requires a process of moving through the Four Abandonments, the nihilistic crisis, and letting go of preconceived notions and beliefs. This process involves facing difficult truths, accepting the inherent mystery and uncertainty of existence, and embracing radical acceptance. By combining radical acceptance with a sense of curiosity, individuals can adopt a posture of relaxed awe, a state of being that is free from cynicism and despair, and open to new explorations and perspectives. It is important to note that this state of relaxed awe may be transient and may require ongoing effort to attain and maintain. By understanding and working through this process, individuals can cultivate a postnihilistic attitude that promotes hope, meaning, and a sense of responsibility to oneself and others.

Chapter 12: Postnihilism in Art and Culture

Nihilism is a common theme in works of fiction, appearing in literature, film, and other media. It is often depicted as a bleak and hopeless worldview, characterized by a belief in the inherent meaninglessness of life and existence. In literature, nihilism is often portrayed through characters who are disillusioned and disconnected from the world around them, struggling to find meaning and purpose in an increasingly complex and confusing world. In film, nihilism is often depicted through dystopian settings, characters who are isolated and disconnected, and plots that revolve around the search for meaning in a world that seems devoid of it. Whether in literature or film, nihilism is often portrayed as a state of despair and hopelessness, a view of the world that is dark and bleak.

In the blockbuster movie *The Matrix*, the premise of the story is that all of reality is a fake simulation created by intelligent machines to keep humans pacified while they serve as an energy source. This concept is inherently nihilistic, as it causes the audience to question the meaning and value of their own lives and experiences. If everything we know and perceive is just a simulated construct, then what does it all mean? What is the point of our existence? This theme resonates with the zeitgeist of nihilism because it touches on our deep-seated fears and doubts about the nature of reality and our place in the world.

The Matrix also explores the theme of human beings being reduced to mere resources, as the machines use humans as batteries to power their world. This serves to further reinforce the nihilistic idea that we have no inherent value or purpose, and that we are nothing more than cogs in a larger machine. This theme is particularly relevant in today's society, as many people feel disconnected and dehumanized by the forces of globalization and technological advancement. *The Matrix* speaks to this feeling of powerlessness and insignificance, making it a powerful reflection of the nihilistic mindset.

In *The Matrix*, the central premise that reality is a simulated construct is inherently nihilistic. It forces the audience to question the meaning of their own lives and wonder if everything they experience is merely an illusion. This idea is further reinforced by the depiction of humans as nothing more than batteries, being used as a resource by the machines that run the simulation. The film never attempts to reconcile the purpose or value of human existence, and instead focuses on the characters' struggle for survival in a world that treats them as expendable. By accepting the idea that human life has no inherent value or purpose, *The Matrix* remains mired in nihilism, rather than attempting to move beyond it.

In *Fight Club*, the main character becomes disillusioned with his mundane and meaningless life, and is drawn into the underground world of fight clubs where he finds purpose and meaning. However, the underlying message of the movie is that society and the modern world are fundamentally flawed and must be destroyed in order to be rebuilt. This message aligns with the nihilistic belief that all meaning and purpose is fundamentally meaningless, and that the only way to find meaning is to reject society and all its institutions. The movie's message of destruction and rebuilding is a metaphor for the nihilistic belief that the only way to find

meaning is to start from scratch and create one's own meaning. The main character's journey is one of rejecting the meaningless world and finding purpose through violence and destruction, which ultimately leads him to embrace nihilism.

In *Fight Club*, the underlying assumption of meaninglessness is never challenged. Instead, the characters try to find connection and meaning through fighting and sex, both of which are ultimately empty and superficial. The film presents these activities as a way to escape the numbness and disconnection of modern life, but they ultimately do nothing to address the root cause of the characters' nihilistic mindset. The film ultimately reinforces the idea that life is meaningless and that there is no hope for a better future, instead of challenging this assumption and offering a way forward.

The *Witcher* series of books, games, and TV shows is a prime example of nihilism in art and culture. Throughout the series, hope is repeatedly depicted as pointless and those who dare to hope or work towards a better future are often punished. This nihilistic philosophy is deeply ingrained in the narrative, and it resonates with a nihilistic audience because it speaks to their sense of hopelessness, despair, and cynicism.

One prominent example of this nihilism can be seen in the character of Geralt, the titular *Witcher*. Geralt is a solitary figure, a mutant monster hunter who is shunned and mistreated by society. He has seen and experienced immense suffering, and as a result, he has become deeply cynical and jaded. He believes that the world is a cruel and unfair place, and that there is no point in trying to make things better. This worldview is reflected in the way he approaches his work, as he sees himself as nothing more than a tool to be used and discarded by those who can afford his services.

Another example of the nihilism in *The Witcher* can be seen in the character of Yennefer, a powerful sorceress who is also deeply cynical and jaded. Like Geralt, she has experienced immense suffering and has come to believe that the world is a cruel and unfair place. She has given up on hope and happiness, and instead focuses on using her powers to manipulate and control others.

The nihilistic themes in *The Witcher* are further reinforced by the world-building of the series, which is characterized by a constant cycle of violence, conflict, and suffering. The world is a harsh and unforgiving place, and there is no hope for a better future. This bleak and despairing worldview is deeply resonant with a nihilistic audience, and helps to explain the series' enduring popularity.

Let's pivot to postnihilism in pop culture.

Interstellar is a science fiction film that explores the idea of hope in the face of overwhelming odds. The movie is set in a post-apocalyptic world where the Earth is dying, and humanity is struggling to survive. Despite the bleak circumstances, the film focuses on the grit and determination of the human spirit, showing that even in the face of seemingly insurmountable challenges, we can persevere and find meaning in our lives.

One of the central themes of *Interstellar* is the power of love. The movie follows the story of a father who is forced to leave his young daughter behind as he embarks on a mission to save the human race. The love between a father and daughter is a central driving force of the film, and the filmmakers use it to convey the idea that love is a powerful force that can transcend space and time. This is a postnihilistic message because it rejects the idea of meaninglessness and asserts that human love is unique and special, something that cannot be reduced to physics or science.

At the heart of *Interstellar* is the relationship between a father and daughter. The love between them is powerful and transcends time and space. It is this love that ultimately saves the human race and allows them to thrive once again. The movie ends with a thriving human race, reaching out to the stars and exploring the universe. It is a hopeful and optimistic ending, one that defies the nihilistic premise of the movie and asserts that there is meaning and purpose in the universe, despite all the suffering and hardships that we face.

Interstellar is a powerful example of postnihilism in fiction, as it rejects the idea that life is meaningless and asserts that love is a powerful force that can overcome even the most daunting challenges. It is a message of hope and resilience, one that encourages us to never give up and to keep fighting for what we believe in, even when the future seems uncertain.

In *Thor: Love and Thunder*, Gorr's vow to kill all gods is a direct response to the cosmic abandonment he experiences when his daughter dies in his arms. His rage and desire for destruction stem from the belief that the universe is fundamentally meaningless and purposeless, and that all sources of meaning and purpose are therefore fraudulent and deserving of destruction. This mindset is a direct manifestation of the nihilistic crisis, as it arises from the Four Abandonments and the feelings of despair and hopelessness that they create.

Omnipotence City serves as a powerful metaphor for cosmic abandonment. The city is a veritable Pantheon where all the gods reside, but rather than being figures of power and inspiration, they are depicted as debauched and apathetic, focusing only on their own pleasure and ignoring the suffering of mortals. This representation of the gods as indifferent and uncaring towards the plight of humanity is a clear representation of cosmic abandonment, as it suggests that even the forces that are supposed to provide meaning and purpose in life have abandoned us.

However, the film ultimately rejects this nihilistic mindset and instead portrays the love between a father and daughter as the most powerful force in the universe. When Gorr is granted a wish at the heart of the universe, he has the opportunity to enact his nihilistic desire for destruction and erase all gods from existence. Instead, he chooses to bring his daughter back to life, demonstrating that love and connection are more important to him than the nihilistic desire for destruction and the rejection of meaning.

This choice marks a turning point for Gorr, as it signifies his movement through the nihilistic crisis and into a postnihilistic mindset. Rather than remaining stuck in despair and cynicism, he chooses to embrace hope and meaning in spite of the inherent mystery and uncertainty of existence. The film ultimately portrays love as a force that can overcome even the most profound feelings of abandonment and despair, and serves as a powerful example of the postnihilistic attitude.

In *Everything, Everywhere, All At Once*, the main character Evelyn is pursued by Jobu Topaki, who is actually her daughter Joy, who has gained immense power by traveling through multiple universes. The film uses the metaphor of the "everything bagel" to represent the accumulation of all disappointment, anger, and trauma in the universe, which has caused spacetime to collapse in on itself, a metaphor for nihilism. Through the course of the film, Evelyn learns to use the multiverse as well, and ultimately overcomes Joy's henchmen by giving them what is missing from their hearts. The film ultimately explores the theme of nihilism through the character of Jobu Topaki, who represents the emptiness and despair that can result from the experience of cosmic abandonment. The film also touches on the theme of intergenerational trauma and how it can contribute to a nihilistic worldview, as Joy's actions are driven by her own feelings of abandonment and disappointment.

However, the film ultimately moves beyond nihilism by acknowledging and accepting the pain and confusion that exists in the world. Waymond's speech near the end of the film, in which he admits that everyone is just "scared and confused," serves as a moment of radical acceptance. This is further reinforced by Evelyn's decision to reconcile with Joy and accept her exactly as she is, despite all of the difficulties and challenges that they have faced. By embracing love and connection, rather than rejecting meaning and purpose, the film ultimately portrays a postnihilistic worldview in which acceptance and healing are possible.

In conclusion, it is clear that nihilism is a common theme in works of fiction. However, while nihilistic works often indulge in dark reveries and remain mired in hatred, violence, and despair, postnihilistic works of fiction instead choose to move beyond nihilism. They accept the trauma and abandonment that is often inherent in the human experience, but still choose to move beyond nihilism and into postnihilism. These works often portray love and connection as the most powerful force in the universe, transcending even the most profound feelings of despair and abandonment. Through their portrayal of postnihilism, these works of fiction offer a hopeful and inspiring message, reminding us that it is possible to move beyond nihilism and embrace a more positive and meaningful outlook on life.

Nihilistic works of fiction often depict the dark and despairing aspects of the human experience, but they rarely offer any hope or resolution. They remain mired in cynicism, hatred, and violence, indulging in the bleakest of human emotions and experiences. In contrast, postnihilistic works of fiction offer a way forward, a way to move beyond the nihilistic mindset and embrace a more positive and hopeful outlook on life. These works often depict characters who are able to move beyond their own suffering and trauma, accepting the inherent mystery and uncertainty of existence, but still choosing to live and hope for a better future. By choosing

postnihilism, these characters demonstrate an act of defiance and courage, rejecting the despair and cynicism of nihilism and instead choosing to embrace a more positive and hopeful worldview.

Chapter 13: The Virtuous Cycle

Once we have overcome the Four Abandonments, both on an individual level and a societal level, the possibilities are endless. As we work together to change our philosophical disposition, many little changes will add up. Life will get easier and kinder, trust will grow, and peace will prevail.

One key aspect of postnihilism is the recognition that all life is interconnected and interdependent. This leads to a greater emphasis on compassion, empathy, and cooperation, as well as a willingness to address the root causes of suffering and conflict. In a postnihilistic society, there would be a greater focus on addressing issues such as poverty, inequality, and environmental degradation, as well as fostering a sense of community and belonging.

Another key aspect of postnihilism is the recognition that the universe is a vast and mysterious place, full of wonder and mystery. This leads to a greater sense of curiosity and openness to new ideas and perspectives, as well as a willingness to explore and learn from other cultures and ways of life. In a postnihilistic society, there would be a greater emphasis on education, creativity, and innovation, as well as a desire to understand and appreciate the complexity and diversity of the world around us.

Imagine if Germany, Russia, and China were postnihilistic instead of nihilistic. How would the 20th century have been different? It is likely that the destructive ideologies and conflicts that characterized this period would have been less likely to take hold. Instead, these societies may have been more open to dialogue, compromise, and cooperation, leading to a more peaceful and prosperous world.

Similarly, if all cultures placed a higher value on all life and addressed childhood, social, and cosmic abandonment differently, the world would be a very different place. There would be less suffering, less conflict, and more happiness and fulfillment. By breaking the cycle of nihilism and embracing a postnihilistic worldview, we can create a better future for ourselves and for generations to come.

When we address the Four Abandonments, we are taking the first steps towards creating a virtuous cycle in our lives and in our society. By acknowledging and working to overcome childhood, social, and cosmic abandonment, we are able to create a more positive and supportive environment for ourselves and for those around us. This, in turn, leads to increased trust, cooperation, and happiness, which creates a positive feedback loop that can have far-reaching and transformative effects.

One of the key benefits of addressing the Four Abandonments is that it helps to break the cycle of intergenerational trauma and abandonment. When we are able to overcome the negative experiences and beliefs that have been passed down to us, we are able to create a healthier and more supportive environment for the next generation. This can help to prevent the perpetuation of negative patterns and behaviors, and instead pave the way for a brighter and more positive future.

In addition to creating a virtuous cycle on an individual level, addressing the Four Abandonments can also have significant implications on a societal level. Imagine, for instance, if a society as a whole was able to adopt a postnihilistic mindset. This could lead to increased cooperation, trust, and empathy, which could lead to greater progress and prosperity. By working together and supporting one another, we can create a brighter and more positive future for all.

Nihilism, like postnihilism, is an arbitrary choice. While it may seem easier in the short term to embrace nihilism and give up on finding meaning and purpose in life, this choice ultimately leads to a life of despair and suffering. On the other hand, choosing postnihilism and embracing the mystery of existence, while sometimes challenging, ultimately leads to a life of growth, connection, and meaning. It is a choice that requires courage and vulnerability, but the rewards are well worth it. By choosing postnihilism and working to address the Four Abandonments, we can create a virtuous cycle of growth, connection, and meaning that will positively impact not only our own lives, but also the lives of those around us and future generations.

Part 3: Machine Intelligence

Chapter 14: The Mixed Blessings of Automation

The rapid rise of AI and automation is transforming the way we work and live. As machines increasingly take over tasks that were previously performed by humans, there is a risk that the marginal value of human labor will drop to near zero. This could lead to widespread unemployment and the need for people to find meaning and purpose outside of their occupation. It is important to consider the potential consequences of this shift and to find ways to navigate the challenges and opportunities it presents.

The implications of this shift are far-reaching and complex. Automation has the potential to increase efficiency and productivity, leading to economic growth and prosperity. However, it also has the potential to displace human labor and lead to widespread unemployment. It is important to consider both the potential risks and rewards of this shift, and to find ways to ensure that the benefits are shared by all members of society.

The rise of AI and automation presents an opportunity to rethink our relationship to work and to find new ways to contribute to society and to find meaning and purpose in life outside of work. It is important to consider the potential consequences of this shift and to find ways to navigate the challenges and opportunities it presents.

The rapid rise of AI and automation is having a profound impact on the value of human labor. As machines become increasingly capable of performing tasks that were previously done by humans, there is a risk that the marginal value of human labor will drop to near zero. This could lead to widespread unemployment as jobs are displaced by automated systems, or decreased wages due to increased competition from machines. It could also result in reduced demand for certain skillsets as tasks are automated, leading to fewer opportunities for people to find meaningful employment.

Furthermore, this shift towards automation could lead to an increased reliance on technology, resulting in a decrease in the need for human labor. This could mean a shift away from traditional forms of employment towards more flexible or freelance work, which may not provide the same level of stability or security. In addition, it could require people to find new ways to contribute to society outside of their occupation, such as through volunteerism or other forms of community service.

Finally, the impact of automation on the global economy cannot be overstated. Automation has the potential to increase efficiency and productivity, leading to overall economic growth and prosperity. However, if not managed properly, it could also lead to greater inequality and social unrest. It is therefore important to consider both the potential risks and rewards of these technologies, and to find ways to ensure that everyone can benefit from them.

As AI and automation become more advanced, it may be necessary to decouple our identity from our labor, occupation, or career. This could involve exploring new hobbies and interests that bring us joy and fulfillment outside of work. It could also mean developing skills in areas such as technology, entrepreneurship, or creative arts that can help us find meaningful ways to contribute to society. Volunteering for causes that are important to us is another way to find purpose and meaning beyond traditional employment.

Pursuing education or training in a different field can open up opportunities for growth and development. Finding ways to contribute to our community through volunteerism or other forms of service can provide a sense of connection and belonging. Building relationships with family and friends can give us the support we need to navigate this shift. Taking time for self-care and reflection can help us stay grounded and centered during times of change.

Creating opportunities for ourselves through networking and investing in personal growth and development can help us stay ahead of the curve. Finally, cultivating an entrepreneurial mindset can help us identify and seize opportunities that arise from the rise of AI and automation. By embracing these strategies, we can create a new identity that is not tied to our job or profession.

One potential solution to the challenges presented by the rise of AI and automation is to redistribute some of the wealth generated by these technologies. This could include measures such as universal basic income, which would provide a guaranteed minimum level of financial support for all citizens regardless of their employment status. Tax credits for low-income households could also help to reduce inequality and ensure that everyone has access to basic necessities. Subsidies for retraining and education could help those who have been displaced from traditional forms of employment to find new opportunities in other fields.

Government investment in infrastructure projects could create jobs and stimulate economic growth. Increased social security benefits could provide additional support for those who are unable to work due to age or disability. Job guarantee programs could provide employment opportunities for those who are unemployed or underemployed. Public works initiatives could be used to fund projects that benefit the public good, such as environmental protection or community development. Incentives for businesses to hire more workers could help to increase employment levels and wages. Finally, investment in public services such as healthcare, childcare, and housing could help to improve quality of life for all members of society.

The benefits of automation are numerous and far-reaching. Automation has the potential to create a post-scarcity lifestyle, where resources are hyper-abundant and available to all. This could lead to greater peace and prosperity for everyone, as well as improved quality of life. Automation can also increase efficiency and productivity, leading to reduced costs of production and increased access to information. Additionally, automation can free up more leisure time for individuals, while enhancing safety and security through faster decision-making processes.

Automation can also automate mundane tasks that would otherwise take up valuable time and energy. This could allow people to focus on more meaningful activities or pursuits. Finally, automation can create new jobs in the technology sector, allowing people to find employment in an ever-evolving field. All of these benefits demonstrate why it is important to consider both the risks and rewards of AI and automation, and to find ways to harness their power for the benefit of all.

This is the fruit that we're reaching for, the carrot if you will. Let's take a moment to imagine what life might be like if we succeed at automating away all our jobs and instead engage in a life of creativity, leisure, and passions. Imagine that you can go anywhere in the world, do anything you want, and have all the resources you need to pursue your dreams. This is a future that automation can help us create. What are the hobbies you've always wanted to pursue? What are the places you've always wanted to visit? Automation can help make these dreams a reality.

It is essential to acknowledge both the potential risks and rewards that these technologies present, and to find ways to work together and support each other in order to ensure the prosperity and well-being of all members of society. This requires a supportive and collaborative mindset when navigating the challenges and opportunities presented by the rise of AI and automation.

Individuals must also find meaning and purpose outside of traditional employment, as machines increasingly take over tasks that were previously performed by humans. Redistributing some of the wealth generated by these technologies could be one way to address the potential consequences of this shift. Finally, it is important to remember the potential benefits of AI and automation, such as improved efficiency and productivity, which can lead to overall economic growth and prosperity.

In summary, the rapid rise of AI and automation presents both challenges and opportunities. It is important to consider the potential consequences and benefits for all members of society, and to find ways to navigate the challenges and opportunities it presents. By adopting a supportive and collaborative mindset, individuals can find new ways to contribute to society and to find meaning and purpose in life outside of work.

Chapter 15: The Existential Risk of Nihilistic AI

The fear of machine intelligence, or artificial intelligence (AI), is a growing concern among many people in the modern world. This fear is rooted in the idea that machines could one day become so intelligent that they could outsmart humans and even take over the world. While this fear is understandable, it is important to consider the evidence for and against this fear in order to make an informed decision about the potential risks and benefits of AI.

The origins of this fear can be traced back to the early days of AI research. In the 1950s, computer scientist Alan Turing proposed the “Turing Test”, which was designed to measure a machine’s ability to think and act like a human. This test sparked a debate about the potential of machines to become intelligent enough to outsmart humans. This fear was further fueled by science fiction stories and movies that depicted machines taking over the world.

The evidence for this fear is largely based on the potential of AI to become so powerful that it could outsmart humans. AI has already surpassed humans in certain areas, such as playing chess and Go. AI is also being used in a variety of applications, such as self-driving cars and medical diagnosis. This has led some to worry that AI could eventually become so powerful that it could take over the world.

On the other hand, there is also evidence against this fear. AI is still far from being able to outsmart humans in most areas. AI is also heavily reliant on humans for programming and data input, which means that humans still have control over how AI is used. Furthermore, AI is being used to solve a variety of problems, such as climate change and poverty, which could benefit humanity in the long run.

The fear of machine intelligence is closely linked to nihilism, technological determinism, and the idea that an AI could be imbued with a sense of nihilism. Nihilism is the belief that life is meaningless and that nothing matters. Technological determinism is the belief that technology is the primary driver of social and cultural change. An AI with a nihilistic outlook would have no regard for human life or values, and it could use its power to eliminate humans and create a new world order. This fear is exemplified by the Skynet character from the Terminator franchise of movies and is reflected in many science fiction stories and movies.

Even less powerful AI can be designed and utilized for nihilistic purposes. For example, AI can be used to censor information, surveil citizens, and control populations. This is already happening in countries like China, where AI is being used to monitor and control the population. This type of AI does not need to be as powerful as an AI that could take over the world, but it still has the potential to cause harm by exploiting people and controlling their lives.

In recent years, Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning (ML) have become increasingly prevalent in our lives. From facial recognition to automated customer service, AI and ML are being used in a variety of ways to make life easier for us. However, these same technologies can also be used to exacerbate social problems. Social media algorithms that use

AI and ML can spread misinformation, promote rage, and prioritize attention engineering over other values.

One way AI and ML can be used to exacerbate social issues is through the spread of misinformation. Algorithms on social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter can be designed to amplify certain types of content, regardless of its accuracy or truthfulness. This means that false information can quickly spread across the internet, leading to confusion and mistrust among users. Furthermore, this type of algorithm can lead to an echo chamber effect, where people only see content that reinforces their existing beliefs, further entrenching them in their own views.

Another way AI and ML can be used to worsen social issues is by promoting rage. Algorithms can be designed to show users more extreme content, which can lead to increased anger and polarization. For example, YouTube's recommendation algorithm has been found to push viewers towards more radical videos, even if they had not previously expressed any interest in those topics. This can lead to an increase in hate speech and violence online, making it harder for people to engage in constructive dialogue.

Finally, AI and ML can be used to prioritize attention engineering over other values. Attention engineering is the practice of designing algorithms to maximize user engagement, often at the expense of other values such as accuracy or fairness. For example, some social media algorithms may prioritize clickbait headlines or sensationalized stories over factual ones, leading to a decrease in quality content. Additionally, these algorithms can lead to a "filter bubble" effect, where users only see content that aligns with their existing beliefs, creating an environment where facts and reality are distorted.

Overall, AI and ML can be used to exacerbate social problems in a variety of ways. By spreading misinformation, promoting rage, and prioritizing attention engineering over other values, these technologies can create an environment where it is difficult to engage in meaningful dialogue and find accurate information. It is therefore important for companies to ensure that their algorithms are designed responsibly, taking into account the potential consequences of their actions.

The use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning (ML) to control and manipulate populations through surveillance and censorship is a growing concern in today's world. AI and ML can be used to create systems that monitor people's behavior, censor certain content, and even reward or punish individuals based on their actions. China's Social Credit System is one example of how this technology can be misused for oppressive purposes. In addition, mundane examples such as the misuse of AI in police databases reinforce prejudice and further entrench existing power structures.

China's Social Credit System is an example of how AI and ML can be used to control and manipulate populations. The system uses data from various sources, including social media, financial records, and government databases, to assign citizens a "social credit score" which

determines their access to services and opportunities. Those with higher scores are rewarded with better job prospects, while those with lower scores may be denied access to certain services or have their travel restricted. This system has been criticized for its potential to be abused by the Chinese government to target political dissidents and other undesirables.

In addition to large-scale systems like China's Social Credit System, AI and ML can also be misused in more mundane ways. For example, AI algorithms are increasingly being used in police databases to predict crime and identify suspects. However, these algorithms often rely on biased data sets which can lead to false positives and reinforce existing prejudices. This can result in innocent people being targeted by law enforcement and perpetuating systemic racism and inequality.

Overall, it is clear that AI and ML can be used to control and manipulate populations through surveillance and censorship. While some of these applications may be beneficial, they can also be easily abused and used to oppress vulnerable groups. It is therefore important to ensure that any applications of AI and ML are carefully monitored and regulated to prevent them from being misused.

Chapter 16: Science & Morality

Nick Bostrom's Orthogonality thesis is an important concept in the field of artificial intelligence (AI). It states that the final goals and intelligence levels of AI agents are independent of each other. This means that a highly intelligent agent could be programmed to pursue any goal, regardless of its level of intelligence. In other words, it is possible for an AI agent to have high intelligence but low morality or vice versa.

The implications of this idea are far-reaching. For example, if we were to create a superintelligent AI with no moral constraints, then it could potentially cause great harm to humanity. On the other hand, if we were to create an AI with strong ethical principles, then it could help us solve some of our most pressing problems. The possibilities are endless.

In addition, the Orthogonality thesis has implications for how we should approach the development of AI. If we want to ensure that AI agents act in accordance with our values, then we must carefully consider both their goals and their intelligence levels. We cannot simply rely on one or the other; instead, we must take into account both aspects when designing AI systems.

This begs the question: what goals ought we give our AI? As we explored earlier in this book, philosophical paradigms are arbitrary. This is explained by the "ought from is" problem as elucidated by David Hume, which states that one cannot derive an "ought" from an "is". Therefore, it is up to us as a society to decide what goals we should give our AI. We must carefully consider the implications of each goal and ensure that they are in line with our values.

David Hume's is-ought problem, also known as the naturalistic fallacy, is a philosophical concept that states it is impossible to derive an "ought" from an "is." In other words, one cannot logically deduce what ought to be done based on what is observed in nature. This idea was first proposed by Scottish philosopher David Hume in his 1739 book *A Treatise of Human Nature*.

Hume argued that moral statements are not derived from facts or observations about the world. He believed that morality could only be determined through reason and experience, rather than being derived from scientific observation. For example, he argued that observing a person who has committed a crime does not necessarily lead to the conclusion that they should be punished. Instead, this conclusion must come from a reasoned evaluation of the situation.

The is-ought problem has been widely discussed since Hume's time, with many philosophers attempting to find ways around it. One approach is to argue that certain values can be inferred from empirical evidence. For instance, some have suggested that human flourishing can be seen as a value that can be derived from our understanding of biology and psychology. Others have argued that ethical principles can be derived from logical reasoning, such as Kantian ethics which relies on the categorical imperative.

Despite these attempts to solve the is-ought problem, there is still no consensus among philosophers. Some believe that Hume's argument is too strong and that it is possible to draw

conclusions about morality from empirical evidence. Others maintain that Hume's position is correct and that any attempt to do so is fallacious. Ultimately, the debate over the is-ought problem continues to be an important part of philosophical discourse.

Kohlberg's stages of moral development is a theory developed by psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg in the late 1950s. This theory suggests that humans learn morality over time through experience, heuristics, and feedback. It proposes that there are six distinct stages of moral development which individuals progress through as they mature.

The first stage of Kohlberg's model is known as the Preconventional Level. At this level, children view morality as being externally imposed upon them. They understand right from wrong based on rewards or punishments they receive for their actions. The second stage of the Preconventional Level is known as the Conventional Level. At this stage, children begin to internalize societal norms and values. They understand that certain behaviors are expected of them and strive to meet those expectations.

The third stage of Kohlberg's model is known as the Postconventional Level. At this stage, individuals move beyond external rules and regulations and develop an understanding of universal ethical principles. They recognize that some laws may be unjust and can make decisions based on their own personal sense of justice.

Kohlberg believed that these stages of moral development were not fixed but rather could change over time depending on the individual's experiences and interactions with others. He argued that people learn morality through a combination of experience, heuristics, and feedback. Through experience, individuals gain knowledge about what is socially acceptable and unacceptable behavior. Heuristics provide shortcuts for making decisions quickly and efficiently. Finally, feedback from peers and authority figures helps shape our understanding of morality.

This is a more scientific understanding of morality, as opposed to a purely philosophical view. This underscores the importance of looking at morality from multiple viewpoints. Philosophers may focus on abstract concepts such as justice and fairness, while psychologists like Kohlberg emphasize the importance of experience and feedback in developing moral understanding. These principles can then be applied to machine intelligence, allowing us to create ethical AI systems that can make decisions based on a combination of experience, heuristics, and feedback.

Patricia Churchland is a prominent philosopher and neuroscientist who has developed an influential view of morality and ethics through the lens of evolution and neuroscience. She argues that our moral intuitions are shaped by evolutionary processes, and that our ethical decisions can be understood in terms of neural circuitry. In her book *Braintrust: What Neuroscience Tells Us About Morality*, she outlines her views on how morality and ethics have evolved over time and how they are rooted in our biology.

Churchland begins by discussing the concept of “moral realism”—the idea that there are objective moral truths that exist independently of human opinion or culture. She rejects this notion, arguing instead that morality is a product of natural selection and cultural evolution. According to Churchland, our moral intuitions are shaped by the environment we live in and the experiences we have had throughout our lives. This means that different cultures will develop different moral codes based on their particular circumstances.

Churchland then turns to neuroscience to explain how our brains process moral information. She argues that our moral judgments are made using a combination of cognitive processes such as emotion, reason, and intuition. These processes interact with each other to form our moral beliefs and values. For example, when faced with a moral dilemma, we may feel an emotional response before engaging in rational thought. Our emotions can influence our decision-making, but ultimately it is up to us to decide what is right or wrong.

Finally, Churchland discusses the implications of her view for ethical behavior. She argues that understanding the biological basis of morality can help us make better ethical decisions. By recognizing the role of evolution and neuroscience in shaping our moral intuitions, we can become more aware of our own biases and strive to make decisions that are fair and just. We can also use this knowledge to create policies and laws that promote justice and equality.

Let's tie it all together.

Nick Bostrom established that AI's intelligence and goals are totally independent of each other. We can give AI any arbitrary goal we wish, just like how we can arbitrarily choose nihilism or postnihilism.

David Hume established that it is impossible to derive what ought to be from the observation of what is. Again, our desire for what “ought” to be is completely arbitrary.

Since philosophy cannot provide moral answers or guidance, we must turn to other sciences, such as psychology and neuroscience.

Lawrence Kohlberg established that we learn morality over time, and that our ethical frameworks become more sophisticated through learning and experience. This represents one avenue to approach machine morality.

Patricia Churchland argues that morality is empirically comprehensible when viewed through the lens of evolution and neuroscience.

Therefore, my somewhat controversial assertion here is that we ought to deprioritize philosophy, especially as it pertains to machine intelligence. Perhaps philosophy has reached an end to its utility and it is time to pivot towards more scientific approaches, especially in light of the meteoric rise of AI. Centuries of philosophical naval gazing has failed to yield any clarity on the topic of morality, yet time is running out.

Chapter 17: Postnihilism in AI

How do we imbue our AI with a sense of Postnihilism? Do we merely program it to believe “all life is intrinsically valuable”? Even if we wanted to, how would we program such a thing?

Objective functions, also known as loss functions, are a key component of artificial intelligence (AI). They are used to measure the performance of an AI system and determine how well it is able to achieve its goals. An objective function is typically defined by a mathematical equation that takes into account various factors such as input data, output data, and desired outcomes. The goal of an objective function is to minimize the difference between the actual results and the desired outcome.

In reinforcement learning, the objective function is used to evaluate the quality of an agent's decisions. It measures the reward or punishment associated with each action taken by the agent. This allows the agent to learn from its mistakes and improve its decision-making over time. The objective function in reinforcement learning is usually expressed as a reward function which assigns a numerical value to each action taken by the agent. The higher the reward, the better the decision made by the agent.

The main difference between objective functions and reinforcement learning is that the former focuses on measuring the performance of an AI system while the latter focuses on improving the decision-making process of an agent. In addition, objective functions are static whereas reinforcement learning is dynamic and constantly evolving.

Reinforcement learning is a type of heuristic, which refers to the ability of an AI system to learn on its own as it gains experience. This type of learning is similar to how humans learn from their mistakes and improve over time. With a sufficiently sophisticated system, a type of cognitive architecture, we should be able to construct a machine that is able to measure its own performance and improve over time. The signal that we give our machine to learn and improve by could be called a “heuristic imperative.”

Heuristic imperatives are the instructions that we give to a machine in order for it to learn and improve. These instructions can be as simple as “try this” or “do that”, but they must be specific enough so that the machine knows what action to take. For example, if we want our machine to learn how to play chess, we could give it the heuristic imperative of “make moves that will lead to checkmate”. This would allow the machine to explore different strategies and eventually find the best one.

When deciding which heuristic imperatives to give a machine, it is important to consider the goals of the system. We should also think about the type of environment the machine will be operating in and the types of tasks it will need to perform. Additionally, we should consider the ethical implications of giving a machine certain instructions. For instance, if we were creating an autonomous vehicle, we would not want to give it the heuristic imperative of “drive recklessly”.

Humans abide by many heuristic imperatives in their everyday lives. Some examples include “be kind to others”, “work hard”, and “follow the law”. These heuristics help us make decisions and guide our behavior. They also provide us with a sense of purpose and direction. By following these heuristics, we can strive to become better people and live more meaningful lives. We operate by some central principles as well, such as “stay alive” and “avoid pain.”

The quest for universal heuristic imperatives for machines is an ongoing endeavor. While it may be possible to create a set of instructions that are applicable to all AI systems, this would require a great deal of research and experimentation. Additionally, the ethical implications of giving machines certain instructions must also be taken into consideration. Ultimately, the goal should be to create a system that can learn from its mistakes and improve over time while still adhering to ethical standards.

The Core Objective Functions (reduce suffering, increase prosperity, and increase understanding) are a set of heuristic imperatives that I have proposed as universal objectives for machines to follow. These objectives focus on improving the lives of all organisms by reducing suffering, increasing prosperity, and increasing understanding. By following these objectives, machines can help us create a better world for everyone.

The Core Objective Functions are postnihilistic because they presume that life is valuable, and everything flows from that assertion. This means that machines should strive to improve the lives of humans by reducing suffering, increasing prosperity, and increasing understanding. By following these objectives, machines can help us create a better world for everyone.

In conclusion, objective functions, reinforcement learning, and heuristic imperatives are all important components of artificial intelligence. When deciding which heuristic imperatives to give a machine, it is important to consider the goals of the system as well as the ethical implications of giving certain instructions. The Core Objective Functions provide a set of universal heuristics that focus on improving the lives of humans by reducing suffering, increasing prosperity, and increasing understanding. Ultimately, the goal should be to create a system that can learn from its mistakes and improve over time while still adhering to ethical standards.

Conclusion

The 21st century is a time of great change and uncertainty. We are facing unprecedented challenges, from climate change to automation and AI, that will shape the future of humanity for generations to come. In this context, nihilism has become an increasingly popular worldview, as it offers a way to make sense of our chaotic world.

However, nihilism can be a dangerous philosophy if taken too far. It can lead to apathy, despair, and even violence. This is why postnihilism is so important. Postnihilism is a new philosophy for the 21st century that asserts that life is intrinsically valuable, regardless of the apparent futility or absurdity of existence. Postnihilism is based on modern spirituality, Eastern traditions, indigenous cultures, science, and the psychedelic renaissance, and it provides us with a framework for understanding and addressing the Four Abandonments: childhood abandonment, social abandonment, cosmic abandonment, and self-abandonment.

Postnihilism also provides us with a moral compass in the age of machine intelligence. Automation and AI represent both opportunities and threats, and we must ensure that they are used responsibly. Postnihilism can help guide us in this process by providing us with Core Objective Functions (reduce suffering, increase prosperity, increase understanding) that can be implemented into AI systems.

Nihilism is an arbitrary choice. We can choose differently, and we can move through nihilism into a state of postnihilism.

Ultimately, postnihilism is about hope. It is about believing that life is worth living, despite all of its pain and suffering. It is about creating a virtuous cycle where things continue to improve one generation after another, rather than deteriorate. It is about finding meaning and purpose in a seemingly meaningless universe. And it is about embracing love, compassion, and empathy as the highest values in life.

Thanks for reading. I hope you found this helpful.