Utzpfide:

The Hermit

Through every bygone village and past every charted wood lay a clumsy stone furnishing mingled between the gnarled roots of a well to do oak and the foothills of a long forgotten mountainside. The harborage of this lithic seclusion and the product of dramatized asceticism was the parochially arcane philosophizer Utzpfide McMickenmasher. His parents had long ago retreated to this isolated territory in hopes of kindling their queer beliefs out of reach of a mentally cemented society. Now, the Lamarchianly acclimated Utzpfide sat in his favorite cavernous concavity hunched over Diderot’s famous *Encyclopédie*—decades of thought and experience boiled down to the rawness of human nature. Perhaps, if nothing else, there would be some clue as to why it all is as it is.

In the fashion of academic hermitage, the McMickenmashers had fled with one cow, one goat, a pouch of mustard seeds, and an eclectic collection of 117 philosophical masterpieces. They had seized all the tangible knowledge they could carry, voraciously guzzling the wisdom of the mightiest minds in history. Their traveling library had served them well on their abscondence from spasmodic despotism and proved to strengthen the rebellious heart that had carried them thus far.

At last, the powerful words belonged to Utzpfide. And he used them to bolden his adventurous congeniality. The quality and variety of the works had made a lasting impression on his existential weariness. He could read and read, yet the answers only led to more questions. Was the life-long battle worth it? What *is* worth it? His 18th century brethren—the tremendously powerful mental oxen that they were—had done most of the heavy lifting, allowing him to catch a glimpse of meaning, a spark of light that dulled the darkness of despotism and cast shadows of metaphysical fortitude across the great plain of pain. Kant’s *Critiques*, Hume’s *Essay*, Voltaire’s *Candide*, all of these had attempted to present man with an impactful objective meaning. But had they? Or had they merely shifted the narrative until the next philosopher came along?

Utzpfide, now, was determined to find out how much, if anything, he could discover about the meaning of life. Therefore, equipped with a sound philosophical foundation and a ceaseless desire for answers, the hopeful cosmopolitan Utzpfide McMickenmasher set out from his loving cave and marched forth into the dynamic didacticism of the day’s society.

The Baker

If Utzpfide was to find some answers he would first have to find some people. With this in mind, he settled upon taking the path to the nearest town of Spritzville. Departing from the security of his cave, the reality of his determination dawned on him. The task ahead of him would be difficult, but it would help him find the answers he always longed for. His whole life he had read the works of great thinkers, searching tirelessly for the reason he was here in the first place. Now Utzpfide had the chance to hear input from present people. Their ideas wouldn’t be frozen hundreds of years ago but would be fluid in his own day. Of course he was nervous. Would he find what he came for? How would the people treat him? But whatever trepidation entered was immediately washed away by a delirious hope that all would be well. That he would finally understand.

All the way to Spritzville his head spun in any direction it could think of, yet for half a day he pushed forward. His mind would not stop his body now.

Finally, beaten and weary, he could make out the first sprinkles of cottages that dotted the grassland around him. And beyond this, the hopeful avenue of downtown Spritzville. Now the question remained—who to ask? As he made his way past the outfittings of the town, Utzpfide realized that he must ask carefully. He didn’t have time to get to everyone, but he must ask as many archetypes as possible. But first, some food.

The journey had worn him down heavily and the fresh smell of baked bread nearby wafted by his nose and seeped into the crevices of his lethargic body. It goaded his feet to take him to the bakery and coerced his mind to follow.

Inside it proved to be a small brick square of a room. A large display case sat guarding the kitchen behind it and one lonesome table lay open in the back corner. Bulbous and jaunty, a baker stood behind the counter, laying in wait for his customer’s order.

“Could I do one loaf of rye, please?” The baker nodded and headed back to the kitchen. Utzpfide stood in thought. Perhaps here was a man, the day to day bourgeoisie. Surely he found meaning somewhere to be able to get up and bake bread every day.

The baker returned and handed over the rye. “And if I may ask, from where in this life do you seize meaning?”

“From baking bread.” The answer he expected, but not the one he wanted.

“But you don’t think there is something deeper? Something more universal?”

The baker looked at his display case and then back at Utzpfide. “The meaning of life is the reason you wake up, yes? Well, mine is to bake bread. I wake up and I know that people rely on me for their food. This gives me a purpose to bake. And why search for something so ‘universal’ if I will only ever live my own life? For this I must follow personal guidance, for no one can prescribe a wiser meaning to my life than myself.”

“What if there's something better for you to do? What if you’ve boxed yourself into baking when you could’ve had a better life?”

“I suppose I’ll never know. Right now I’ve boxed myself into a meaning I can respect. Even if there is a higher meaning, I do not know it, so I do not know what I am missing out on, therefore I do not miss out on anything. And if I do discover a higher meaning? Well then I’ve found it! You see, if I come across something better I’ll accept it, but for now I’m happy with baking bread because it’s what I know best.”

“Well that’s mighty interesting.” Clutching the loaf of rye he said farewell to the baker as his words set in. *Good people rely on him for something, so that gives him a reason to act. But no one relies on me for anything. Does that mean I have no purpose?* Suddenly, Utzpfide’s quest seemed ridiculous to him. If there was meaning in his life, he would’ve found it by now. But then he thought about the rest of the conversation. *Maybe there is a deeper meaning, but if you don’t know what it is, you can’t be upset about not knowing it.* His wisdom spoke just as well to his quest. Maybe there was a better way to go about finding answers, but he was content with the way he was going about it now, and that was meaningful enough.

The Governor

The door to the bakery shut closed as Utzpfide’s gaze fell upon the town hall across the way. Utzpfide had his answer from the lowest on the hierarchy—now he wondered what the highest would have to say. Being in the midst of a constitutionally democratic town of minimal population, he found it wearisomely simple to walk into the town hall and find the mayor typing away at his desk.

“And to what do I owe this odd visit at such an odd hour by such an odd character?”

“Well if I may,” Utzpfide wrung his hands together in the cliché fashion. “I find you to be a humbly respectable man of dramatically caricatured, yet astutely classical, ideas and yearned to scratch the itch on my brain as to what you presume the purpose of you being here is?”

“Why, I’m here to govern, oversee, and protect the citizens and their opinions.”

“At face value any layman could guess this. What I seek to incur is a more tertiary view of things.”

“Yet you’ve already gotten it my boy!” He shook full of laughter. “Never before have I seen a man assume so arrogantly that he knows what’s what. Well, come now, don’t be ashamed—be aware. It’s just that simple! My purpose in life is to govern, oversee, and protect the citizens of my town—and the world—and their opinions.”

“But the nature of human desire is selfish. If you only work to help others, how will you satisfy yourself?”

“You think so well, yet continually fall prey to your own paradoxical quandaries! You see, there’s a hidden block of code in human nature about selfish unselfishness. If I give to others, it satisfies me because I gain the prospect of potential advantages down the road. Now, even if my underlying motive is selfish, it still doesn’t neglect the consequences of my action—for a man that does good with evil intent is still a good man. Furthermore, the utilitarian nature of my work satisfies both parties, so what’s to be fought against it?”

“I suppose I see your point. The purpose of life is to serve others to make their lives better, in the assumption that they will make your own life better. A societal utilitarianism.”

“Boiled to perfection.”

“Well, I do genuinely wish you luck on your journey. I will heed your words and thank you for your time.” With that he autonomously thanked and departed in a manner fashionable of his propagandic position. Not that Utzpfide blamed him, rather he understood him now. But he still didn’t understand himself. Utzpfide didn’t know anyone, much less know how to make them happy. So was there still no purpose to his life? He vowed to keep searching.

The Aristocrat

Utzpfide was wholeheartedly confused. By now, he had been presented with several ambiguous answers as to the cogs of life. But the answers didn’t sit right with him, didn't seem substantial enough. But who better to contact now than the man who had conquered societal standards. Surely this man had possession of what the masses agreed upon to be worthy. It was in this mindset that Utzpfide managed to track down one of the wealthiest aristocrats in Spritzville—Mr. Bhettwittingston.

Known around town for acquiring a substantial fortune through means of monopolized real estate, Mr. Bhettwittingston was still a bit of a mystery in himself. He didn’t come to town often, rather he preferred to spend his time out in a countryside chateau enjoying the spoils that money had to offer surrounded by the peace that nature had to offer. In any case, this did not deter Utzpfide from journeying into the nearby fields in quest of this mystery man.

After a long morning walk, Utzpfide began to see Bhettwittingston’s estate rise out of the horizon. It was a ridiculously sized house flaunting spectacular amenities, in so much that he couldn’t tell which door was the front door, and then realized that the ‘doors’ were really shutters, and that there lay other behemoths below. At whim he strolled up to one of these behemoths and gave a meager tap. Promptly, the door swung open by the hands of a cliché butler and he was ushered inside.

“Mr. Bhettwittingston, please.”

“Up, right, right, left, right, left, second door on the right.”

“Thank you.”

Simply following the amazingly efficient directions, Utzpfide was able to finally lay eyes on the mystery man, Mr. Bhettwittingston. He found him, oddly enough, fully naked and staring at a blank wall.

“Mr. Bhettwittingston?”

“Yes, my good man. What have you?”

“I wish to skip all the nonsense, you seem to want to as well, and get down to it. Have you found any meaning in your worldly possessions or status?”

“I think we all know by now that I did. And then I didn’t.”

“I see. And that is why you are wearing nothing and doing nothing right now? Because you have already worn everything and done everything?”

“Yes.”

“At first you were fulfilled. But you got tired of the clutter.”

“Yes.”

“And I assume that if you were to prescribe a cure you would tell me to get rid of everything—my mind, possessions, relations—because they only lead to dissatisfaction.”

“Yes.”

“But then I would never find satisfaction because I have nothing to satisfy myself with.”

“Yes.”

“So then you would lead me on to the notion that maybe I shouldn’t be hunting for satisfaction…but something else.”

“Yes.”

“And what would that thing be?”

“It’s a very curious thing. You may not be acclimated to it but stick with me here. The facts are this: we search for satisfaction and every road leads to dissatisfaction. What if…we search for dissatisfaction and thus are led to satisfaction? Wouldn’t that be interesting. Mildly paradoxical, albeit, but interesting.”

“Well…I…” but Utzpfide had nothing to say. The logic was right in front of him. He couldn’t argue it. “So you actively seek dissatisfaction, which eventually you are worn down to, and thus achieve satisfaction. Like building up a resistance to poison through daily dosages.”

“Precisely my idea, boy. Yet, I’m still in the experimental phase so we’ll see if it holds true.”

“I see. Very well. I wish you a good day, sir. Or perhaps a bad one…oh I can’t be sure now anyhow.” Utzpfide stood for a while in the hall. He took a moment to think of all the lessons he had been taught so far on his journey.

The baker had said that having others rely on you forces you to act, which is an innate reason for purpose. But that was a very baseline purpose and seemed too selfless. The governor had advised him to please others with the prospect of personal gain later on. But this seemed too complicated and selfish. And the aristocrat had just now told him to seek dissatisfaction. Something didn’t add up. These were all too coagulated, too externally reliant. And they all left Utzpfide hopeless. Rely on people and reject satisfaction. This couldn’t direct his life, it was the opposite of how he found happiness. But what more was there to do? Worn down and demoralized, Utzpfide made his way to the front door.

“Closest town, please.”

“Left, right, soft right, straight, soft right, straight, left. Kinsingtonshire, sir.”

The Cleric

The petite town of Kinsingtonshire revealed itself in a grandiose development of ecclesiastic ensemblement mixed with a charitable guise of gables and cobblestones to mask the sacerdotal hegemonization of a once felicitous community. Long ago the sly church had taken advantage of a calamitous era, sweeping in with the promise of eternal salvation at the small price of mortal loyalty. Unsurprisingly, the masses continually proved that they would rather know evil than not know good. Kinsingtonshire fell no short of this precept.

But even a facade of hope—though built on a foundation of fear—is still hope. For Kinsingtonshire, the church had provided its people with newfound guidelines to help them on their path towards righteousness. A clear doctrine allowed for an unquestionable route through the quandaries of life. It was now that Utzpfide realized he had missed someone. If anyone knew the meaning of life, it would surely be a master of these moral guidelines: a cleric.

So it was to one of these Kinsingtonshire clerics that Utzpfide happened upon in his quest for the meaning of life. Through the church, Utzpfide had meandered past several priests mumbling and bumbling about, always clutching their bibles and correcting their words should a layman ever attempt to accuse them of being irreligious. But these weren’t the clerics he was in search of—these were political magicians superintended by fear and shame. So he moved on further into the corseted circuitry of the church's backrooms.

Eventually, Utzpfide found himself climbing up a spiraling parapet leading up to the open night air above. As he broke out from the door, he could see a black clothed man peacefully gazing up at the starry spillover.

“Father, may I?” Utzpfide stepped over and knelt beside the cleric. His hands gripped the rocky barrier as his eyes floated to the heavens. The priest did not look at him, but instead acknowledged him with a soft smile. He needn’t look anyways, for it didn’t matter who Utzpfide was. In this man’s church, anyone was welcome. Now here at last was a man of god! “I’ve been struggling as of late to answer the age-old universal riddle. Yet, when I see your palpable loyalty and steadfast determination, I can’t help but respect, be it right or wrong, the peace you have found in having an answer. I was wondering, is there still an answer for someone as faithless as I?”

“What is right and what is wrong? I used to ask myself this all the time.” His words came out gracefully, yet Utzpfide could sense that they were hardwired with painful experiences; an accumulation of knowledge that had ripened only after acceptance. “But I found that I was questioning my way to death. That is, I had left no time to act right or to act wrong. The Lord preaches a world of love, and I act upon that. And if there is no god? Then I am still a loving man.”

“And who’s to be sure that love is the right path?”

“The human body itself. For pleasure is good and pain is bad. I’ve never met a man who has shunned love, just be sure you give it right.”

“And for those who are as committed to their practices as you are to yours?”

“I believe my own enemy, Voltaire, said it best. ‘If there were only one religion in England, there would be danger of tyranny; if there were two, they would cut each other’s throats; but there are thirty, and they live happily together in peace.’ You see, there is a path for everyone in this world. If it is my path, great. If it is another path, it’s just as well. All I ask of you is to live your life with conviction and to act upon it. For me, the meaning of life does not depend on what you chose to believe, but how deeply you chose to believe it.”

“And if you are wrong? If there is a right path?”

Finally, he turned to Utzpfide, placing his hand on his shoulder and catching a breath of the night. “Then we are all wrong together. For no man knows, nor can he wholly act, upon the righteous path without error.” At this, he turned back to the stars, and Utzpfide to the stairs. Here at last was an answer he could stand by.

The Cave

Utzpfide sat in a somber satisfaction in the concavity from which he had long ago departed, his *Encyclopédie* sprawled before him. Maybe the answer had been right in front of him the whole time. For all of his life he had enjoyed hunting for the mysteries of life in his books. Maybe that was the meaning. Why look for a different answer when you are glad with what you have? Utzpfide now realized that he was not doing the wrong thing, but thinking the wrong things about what he was doing.

So remarkably alleviating it was to know that we create our own meaning from within; so amazingly hopeful it was to know that there wasn’t one right answer, but infinitely many.