

The innermost essence of life is its capacity to go out beyond itself, to set its limits by reaching out beyond them; that is, beyond itself.
Georg Simmel, "Life as Transcendence"

The Essence of Humanity

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Prologue

In the beginning, there is only one's being. What constitutes this is beyond my knowledge, but I am inclined to feel that it is beyond any comprehension whatsoever, as it would be to comprehend anything that precisely defines us, our creator.

From our being spawns two divergent paths: one of animalism, common in every living thing, and one of civility, known only to mankind. These two properties of our being are completely beyond our control, just like our being itself, and they work in equal part to create our imagination, that which guides us and defines us. Thus, within our being, we share the traits necessary for survival, the ones that are biological, unpredictable, and unreasonable, and which drive us to act in the same ways. Contrary to this is our civility, which is formed deliberately with more creativity, and which can be reasoned with, is predictable, and which is beyond our current comprehension in the same way as our being. The two conditions exist harmoniously, as without animalism we could not be considered living, and without civility, we could not be considered human.

The severity of imagination within our lives and what defines them is the present topic that will be explored deeply. Its influences are found within all known aspects of the human, for with every peer we make inside ourselves, we see a sliver of its reflection looking back, its being is truly inescapable, and its presence, inexplicable.

I

The concept of pleasure undoubtedly rules our lives. With every act we commit, we are enveloped with pleasure, grand or small, and are satisfied or dissatisfied with its results. What plagues us will taunt our very well-being into getting rid of its disservice, and whatever pleasurable sycophant act we encounter, we

welcome with open arms. It is then true that utility is the defining constant invocation of our lives ¹

This affliction is most certainly not a conscious endeavor. As many have said before, we encounter a grave and life-threatening disservice to ourselves when we chase pleasure in purity, for such an act is the result of the lost, and they will not find anything but disappointment, for they do not know how to live².

Thus, if pleasure is the result of all our actions and there is no conscious understanding of its ways, it is safe to assume that at the core of every being, no matter how conscious or unconscious, human, plant, animal, what have you, exists the central foundation that is pleasure. Spawned into existence by the imagination (For, as creatures of reason, we must first imagine ourselves being pleased, what this phenomenon is, and how we will adorn ourselves with it, else we would be lost. This, counterintuitively, is an elementary activity, regardless of our inability to define the phenomenon, for within every being's rationale exists a concrete definition for pleasure, and thus, it is a metaphysical sensation the consciousness cannot hope to put into words.), this "pleasure sector" of our being is, itself, the later founder of all our endeavors. We will not experience without pleasure or lack thereof, and thus, there is no life without experience and there is no life without pleasure.

We will travel further with this utilitarian understanding of pleasure and explore the phenomenon of desire. We will deem such a phenomenon as spawning from the innate need of pleasure to be experienced, and as a form of reasoning to fulfill our "pleasure sector's" need to be utilized. What is a human, nay, any living being without desire, conscious or unconscious? ³

There is plenty of academic engagement in this field, and many theories of desire and its consequences on action and thought have been proposed⁴. However, before we can use the concept generously, two inconsistencies throughout these theories must be relieved for the sake of developing the forthcoming presented ideas.

I. All desires are formed with the idea of pleasure in mind, either consciously or subconsciously, for there is nothing we would do without providing even the slightest of satisfaction to ourselves. Although many theories of desire provide an

¹Mill, John Stuart. "Utilitarianism." Seven masterpieces of philosophy. Routledge, 2016. 329-375.

²Dietz, Alexander. "Explaining the paradox of hedonism." Australasian Journal of Philosophy 97.3 (2019): 497-510. The paradox of hedonism in many ways agrees with the present statement. However, Dietz's interpretation of hedonism disagrees with the one presented in the paper, as it must be the case that everyone is a hedonist, and it is not impossible for the hedonist to acquire other desires besides the desire for pleasure itself, and instead, the hedonist may have intermediary desires that serve as a connecting bridge between themselves and pleasure, as is common in every person. Although, the idea that the desire of pure pleasure for itself leads to cyclic damnation through a lack of validity for one's state of being pleased is quite logical, and agrees with the later presented ideas of high-order desires being unobtainable for itself. Thus, Dietz's reasoning will be vaguely applied to the forthcoming Frankfurt's beliefs of high-order desires.

³Ironically, such a question is postulated in the latter half of this essay.

⁴Zalta, Edward N., et al. "Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy." See <http://plato.stanford.edu/>. Received September (2002)

argument for this hedonist proposition, many are quick to ignore of its influence or to rebuke its suggestions. However, such a proposition simply must be true for any theory of desire to explain human action and thought, as anything else would be cause for ambiguous actions, and thus, the idea of a source becomes meaningless, just as the various courses for action in the mind of the actor. This is because there exists no counterpoint in which someone performs an action stemming from a desire without any regard to their pleasure or existence, a purely selfless desire. The day in which a person was willing to perform such an action that did not benefit in the slightest their well-being (no satisfaction or no sense of purpose returned to the agent as a reward whatsoever) is the day we must consider external forces acting upon our lives as a potential truth, and such a time would inevitably prove the foundational aspects of religious or spiritual thought. For even when we are doing something "purely for the sake of someone else", virtue for the sake of virtue, there must be some sort of subconscious development or possession that provides pleasure in return i.e. the sense of joy felt by a person after giving a gift, virtuous activities that appeal deeply to one's inert character or "soul" in an attempt to satisfy their need for virtue (this idea of inert virtue or virtue appealing to, or stemming from, an agent's character is common in the works of ethicists as being the purest form of goodheartedness), or even a sense of virtue through virtue, etc. What else would there be to drive someone into recurrently performing these actions? And there is only one empirical case in which a force does this to some person and that is the vital pursuit of pleasure, thus, by definition, this must be the case. Perhaps only in divinity⁵ would someone perform actions that are purely selfless, and despite this, in this scenario, the divine themselves are free of any desire-based influence, regardless of whether the desire is for themselves or others.

To exemplify this argument, we will consider an extreme case in which a morally perfect (to the standards of the opposing ethicists) person is afflicted with the opportunity to save a child from a burning building. Now, in theory, there exists a pathway wherein this person does not gain any satisfaction from relieving the child of their deadly position, as is the argument of some ethicists who believe in "pure" virtue. However, putting aside the question as to whether or not this being is a human or living creature no less, we shall pose the very important question as to why this person would even choose to save the child at all. If they are completely indifferent to the child's status, as it is implied through their lack of feeling for the child's safety, then what would drive them to commit such a virtuous act if walking away, or even gazing bewilderingly at the raging fire, is simply the easier and less straining alternative? There must then be something to gain from this virtue, some satisfaction, otherwise the action would be completely inexplicable. That is to say, the idea of indifference and the idea of inspired virtue or justice conflict, thus eliminating all possibilities in which a person may acquire the two rationalities at the same time and leaving the remaining infinite states in which the agent may do something to satisfy a need, no matter how unseemly this satisfaction may be. In other words, doing

⁵What exactly is divinity and how the divine perform actions is discussed in detail later.

the right thing is an aspect engraved in one's character, and satisfaction from doing the right thing is a divergent branch of pleasure felt only by the virtuous.

To conclude, hedonism and utilitarianism are one and the same if we make the deduction that the virtuous intrinsically gain pleasure from performing virtuous acts that pleasure all, and thus, we claim that the virtuous, like anyone else, only perform said acts because they satisfy their motivation for virtue. This does not suggest that the acts they perform are not truly virtuous, as an agent's gaining in pleasure through a virtuous act does not discredit the child's extreme joy from gaining the opportunity to live another day, and the agent's action is still objectively moral, and their heart in the best of places. Virtuous acts are then a mutual exchange, a happy moment for a happy moment, a happy moment for a sense of relief, or a sense of relief for a sense of relief.

II. Desires are multifaceted. There are many different layers to desires, and the classification of a desire is based on the preliminary desires that have ordained its existence. Intuitively, we consider pleasure to be the "zeroth order" of desires, the one true desire, that which all other desires attempt to satisfy or obtain. The complexity of the next layer, those of the "first order", is the only one which we may presumptuously attribute to all living beings, the aspects of this layer being the origin of desires that are most purely imagined for pleasure, the "heralds of pleasure" if you will, and the "ground projects" or one's desires to live, more formally defined as the desires that will bring about fulfillment in one's life, and upon satisfaction of all, will make one's life meaningless. As mentioned in the works of Williams, without a firm grasp of the ground projects, there would be no point in one's existence, at least from the personal perspective⁶. It is then the ground projects that reveal the true intent and character of a living rational being and cause the above-mentioned virtue desires, thus, it is these desires that give way to morality itself, the inert desire for virtue.⁷

Further, we claim that the zeroth and first-order desires are not obtainable for themselves. Just as pleasure cannot be gained through desire for pleasure in any rational being (since there is nothing to justify one's experience of pleasure), the ground projects too cannot be chased for the idea of themselves. We cannot trick ourselves into being satisfied with the developments of our lives without any relatively substantive proof or sensational pleasure response. Thus, an intermediary is always needed to satisfy these orders of desire. It is only the following orders of desires, those which stem from the first, that can be satisfiable for the sake of themselves i.e. if a coffee will make me be fulfilled I will desire coffee for it's sake and the subsequent sense of fulfillment. Such were the ideas of passion put forth by Frankfurt⁸.

⁶Williams, Bernard. "The Makropulos case: reflections on the tedium of immortality." London, UK (1973).

⁷Arpaly, Nomy. "Moral worth." *The Journal of Philosophy* 99.5 (2002): 223-245. Inert virtue being the only qualification for an agent's desires being morally acceptable is mentioned frequently by Arpaly. Thus, she provides reason for the moral rightness of actions stemming from desires to pleasure one's sense of virtue.

⁸Frankfurt, Harry. "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person." *Agency And Responsibility*. Routledge, 2018. 77-91. The ideas of ordered desires presented differ slightly in comparison to the one's put forth by Frankfurt, but are generally identical. What are later

Lastly, as a result of the attention-based theory, the sequence of orders which stem from the first is limited, as one would surely find defeat in pursuit of an endless number of tasks. It is already yet a challenge for a given agent to willfully devote themselves to a task without a definite vision of pursuit, and if such a series of pursuits extends more than is relatively considered reasonable, the agent would have a proper excuse to abandon the series in its entirety for fear of it not fulfilling its original purpose of pleasure in his preferred time or complexity range, based on the amount of will the agent associates with the desire, thus violating the requirement that the desire must be fulfilled in a preferable fashion in order to be acted upon. When the payout of a sequence is null or an agent predicts that they will be negatively affected by the sequence as opposed to feeling pleased with its results, they will quickly find themselves abandoning this series in its entirety, along with any other desires associated with it, as is the result of the pleasure-based theory.

And so, we claim that desires are the eruptions of a restless volcano called pleasure, and such eruptions may result in how we understand people in their most apparent completeness, through action.

II

We as humans are endlessly bound by the act of craving (even this attachment is mentioned in the works of Buddhism as the central barrier separating humanity from divinity⁹) and do nothing but seek opportunity. Each day we wake and long for the sensation of happiness, but in return we are presented with the harshness of reality. It is for this reason that men without faith, or allegiance, or any other earthly ties or bounds seek the veiled art of nihilism, a prime deception and the purest form of betrayal onto one's self and their own duties for humanity as a whole. Regardless, there are people who still crave without consequence, who still dare to dream and imagine what the world before them could become and what actions they may take to transform this quixotic thought into reality. Presented with neither death nor reward, these people are the heralds of short-term satisfaction and the vessels of endless potential, they are truly human.

Craving is attributed to the human in the form of extreme desire, perhaps it can be best understood in the following context as desires that have crossed some arbitrary threshold such that they are guaranteed to lead a person to action (at least without intervention i.e. from conflicting cravings). There are two main classes of craving: *natural* and *supernatural*. The natural class of

identified as cravings are synonymous with Frankfurt's ideas of second-order volition, while his ideas of first-order desires are more synonymous with subactions, fixed cravings within the mind of the agent. Additionally, Frankfurt's ideas regarding the concept of free will shall be discussed later.

⁹Groves, Paramabandhu, and Roger Farmer. "Buddhism and addictions." *Addiction Research* 2.2 (1994): 183-194.

craving involves powerful desires of the basic necessities needed to sustain life, like food and water, and then some, and it is bound to the physical realm. It is a form of craving that is beyond rationale, a label attributed to 'second-order' desires that stem solely from the innate desire for pleasure and one's animalistic side, and are free from the influence of reason. Most importantly, these cravings are not individual-based or "unique", their origins are shared by all of the same species, and they cannot be owned, for they are distinct from willfully created desires or cravings and are spontaneous in nature. Additionally, they cannot be controlled by an agent without extreme willpower, for their influence, on average, holds greater than that of supernatural cravings, and are completely autonomous to them.¹⁰ Their more prevalent nature is, most likely, the result of biological influence and the art that is evolution, as our bodies have grown to adore certain behaviors so that we may perform our biological duties, and, subsequently, as a result of our physical attributes we may possess. However, as previously stated, these should be separate from our more disciplined desires, as they are, in all technicalities, not owned by an individual's conscience, and may work to influence their conscience in ways and attitudes that go against their true selves (evidenced by their repetitive nature, that of which is akin to hypnosis), or limit their expression of themselves.

Contrarily, supernatural craving arises from extensive imagination and creativity. It requires a large magnitude of input from the conscious to foster a supernatural craving, and their subjects are those exclusively sought by the human species, including artificial concepts and ideas such as absolute power and political authority, and most importantly, virtue and altruism. However, this is not to say that supernatural cravings are entirely artificial, for they can be created and destroyed at will, but this will must originate from somewhere, and our sense of passion is something unique to every person, and thus, they are, in all regards, individual-based and unique to ourselves. Therefore, a person whose nature is to hurt his fellow kind in outrageous disregard for the well-being of others can be expected not to perform the contrary, for it is in their nature to gain pleasure from the pain of others, and they themselves are the antithesis of virtue.

We say that desires have crossed this threshold into their evolution as cravings through extensive imagination and thought surrounding their being, at least in desires that transform into supernatural cravings. For the process of natural craving, this is a lot simpler, and it is in fact through extensive biological influence that these desires transform, and they are usually spawned from desires under the aforementioned classification of 'Heralds of Pleasure' This 'attention-based' theory provides reasoning for converting desires into actions, for a desire

¹⁰Scanlon, Thomas M. "Reasons and passions." (2002). In Scanlon's review of Frankfurt's essays on desires and passions, he mentions the concept of the unwilling addict (first postulated by Frankfurt) that, willfully, goes against his addiction but ultimately succumbs to its influence, which acts as a favorable catalyst for the ideas of *natural* craving. Later in the essay, he exemplifies the case by saying there must exist a scenario in which there may be no reasoning behind the addict taking the drug at all, and in this scenario, he is acting from impulse and without reason. It is this acting without reason, without contribution from the mind or conscious, that I believe is to be attributed to *natural* craving.

can be any random appearance, however, in order for it to be acted upon, an accurate solution must be contrived in a relatively reliable time-frame, and even then, such a solution must be plausible sometime in the near future. The development of such a solution is itself a conscious endeavor, and thus, we deem cravings to be the result of conscious or subconscious imagination, wherein the supernatural is a result of imagination's conscious form and the natural is a result of the subconscious.

Thus, it is proven that what we extensively crave usually comes to fruition through our own action; the imaginary turned physical, as the buildup in the electric charge of a cloud spawns a fierce and thunderous bolt of lightning, so too does the intensive buildup of imagination within one's mind spur the able to action, sometimes ignorant to the consequences.

And with that, it must be true that what we imagine, we create. Every single "creation" of ours, all of our acted-upon desires is a result of, what is so far seen as unique to the humankind, extensive imagination. All great technologies big and small, all pieces of architecture fashioned to accommodate any and all people, all developments in medicinal research, and all groups of people that we have labeled as nations have all spawned from constant conscious rumination and desire, in the minds of the able and willing. So too in their footsteps will we strive towards success and fulfillment and our own unique ideas and twists to provide some sort of betterment to society and some ambiguous form of self-satisfaction and fulfillment through our first-order desires. This should be the zenith cause of every member of every society, and they should have it so engrained within them that it is of their nature to provide some good to the world. It is then with this sentiment that any one person should find success in life, and it is people with these attributes that we consider to be the best of society.

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There are some who have ceased to participate in the cycle of craving, whether it be by choice or force. Besides those who have forfeited their humanity in exchange for divinity (a most unusual and rare case), these people represent themselves as a community composed of a voided spirit and nihilism, and there is no yet grace to give to them besides endless pity, for they are no longer human. Thus there are two avenues for those who do not crave: death of the spirit or divinity (the case for those who do not crave naturally is self-explanatory as the phenomenon called death), either which case depends on one's circumstances, however, neither still encompass the ideas of humanity, and thus, it must be that a living being possessing humanity is neither divine nor completely unimaginative.

The divine are those who seek pleasure in nothing and through nothing. Then achieving a cycle in which they are constantly in pleasure, and they are

in a status beyond our comprehension. This is most certainly caused by a lack or abandoning of one's ground projects and heralds of pleasure, leaving the pleasure sector to utilize itself in such a fashion wherein there is no cessation of its processes. They then achieve a state best known as *nirvana* and are no longer obligated to form cravings because they can simply exist in pleasure at all times. It is for concepts like these that the idea of heaven may seem undesirable to some who value the art of the chase, for without so, they perhaps may find emptiness in their existence, however, the divine or heaven-bound would not just abandon their chase but find no sense of existence in the first place due to a lack of physical and conscious life characterized by the ground projects and motivation to express oneself, they would instead quite literally be the sensation of pleasure itself.

Unlike the case of those who are divine, a mental death is straightforward. This status of one's being occurs when one feels nothing but gains no pleasure from feeling such a way. It is not only the abandoning of one's ground projects but the abandoning of one's pleasure as a whole that results in those who are a 'shell of their former selves'. This idea has been explored quite heavily in literature, as it is not uncommon, and it is most commonly found in those who have experienced the most strife within their lives, and thus those who have given up hope for even the slightest of things. It must then be imperative for one to have an imaginative sense of self, both physical and conscious, in order to be perceived as human, else they are merely a sensation or a lack thereof.

Given that a complete lack of craving results in death, it must be so that the most alive are those yet who have embedded within their character and being a certain insatiability. Instead of craving little or none at all, they crave with such conviction that they will stop at no means to obtain what it is they intrinsically seek, and are thus destined for some relatively positive outcome, even if it does fall short of their goals. "Shoot for the moon and you will at least land among the stars" they say, and these people do exactly that religiously, as is written and fated for them to do so. However, a certain downside to the trait of instability is the constant creation of supernatural cravings. They possess some sort of ground project such that they are never fulfilled, a ground project that can simply never be completed, no matter the amount of effort one puts into it, meaning that one will never feel their satisfaction, the highest and most liberating pleasure of all. A perhaps famous example of this is having the concept of freedom adopted as a ground project, for freedom is something we will never be able to experience in our lives without abandoning our humanity, and thus presents a contradiction and paradox that surely prevents one from ever feeling satisfied with their lives, and they will always desire more, even when presented with opportunities one would conventionally recognize as free.

On the topic of freedom, the dead, divine, and overambitious all lack what would classically be considered as a will of their own. For starters, the most intuitive of the bunch would be the case of the overachiever, wherein they do not possess the ability to stop their overambitious cravings, even when they are doubting its positive influence within their life, and thus, they are not free to control their actions because they cannot help the sense of short-term pleasure

they feel from their overachievement. The case of the divine are once again intuitive for they do not have a will in the first place for there is no reason for pleasure to create will, and thus, their sense of will is uncontrollable. Finally, the consciously dead do not possess free will in a partially identical way to the divine, as with a lack of ground projects, they have only their animalistic side (even this sense being left within them is in only the most optimistic scenarios given the aforementioned requirements for mental death) to seek pleasure from, and seeing as how natural cravings are completely autonomous to the conscious, the truly nihilistic agent is left with no definitive free will.

It is then the case that any of these states of being are considered undesirable to the rational being. However, the average rational person does not have to endure such a fate, for they, at least relatively, possess some form of free will.

III

If both extremes of craving are disastrous to the rational conscious and there is empirical evidence for the variability of happiness and fulfillment within people, then it must mean that there is some preferable balance that stresses both sides while maintaining one's traditional humanity. Such a balance, I believe, is found in a lack of complacency in one person, in that a person should possess the ambitiousness of those who are insatiable, to some extent, for the aforementioned greater good of the people around us and humanity as a whole, but that they should be competent enough to know when their duty is done, to know when they should forfeit in order to protect and sustain themselves for the same altruist reasons, to not embellish and produce harm in their overzealousness.

Although this is seen as the optimal circumstance for one's acquisition of pleasure throughout one's life, it is both unfortunate and expected for me to say that most people do not find themselves in this position and that they are on either side of the midpoint, pointing towards either over-ambitiousness or hopelessness. Thus, it is our objective not to obtain perfection in living but to approach it as nearly as possible. Those who swear no allegiance or find hardship in entrusting the environment in which they live with their well-being should develop more independence and optimism, while those who find themselves too dedicated to cravings and over-imaginative may find comfort in seeking peace and meditating on what they already have. Of course, if these traits are associated with one's nature, then demise is almost guaranteed, however, in most people, discipline can be built regarding these subjects and these boundaries can be removed. Although the opportunity for change is in everyone's nature, as is the result of reason, it is merely harder to coerce the passionate into controlling their passion than to mold the blank slate, such is the result of our being. Therefore, the mundane are not so mundane, and the common are not so common, as every average person has the opportunity to flourish and fulfill

their duties, to abuse their flexibility to take advantage of their livelihood in the name of the greater good, and success as a whole.

Additionally, this flexibility is a result of the above mentioned 'free will' possessed by those lie somewhere around their intersection. It just so happens to be that their imagination grants them such general projects that there is no conflict between what desires or cravings they would want and what desires or cravings they have, and thus, they gain free will. Therefore, free will is an aspect of chance, and is not remotely similar to as it is traditionally seen whatsoever, it is completely relative to the person.

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And with that, we now return to the concept of imagination. If it so that the worst of humanity offered to society is in a form absent of craving and the most productive in a form without rest and fulfillment, and the average person lies in the middle of these extremes, waiting to fulfill their potential, and seeing as how the dead are unimaginative and the unsatiable are excessively so, then the average person must possess some form of imagination.

Thus, the role of imagination within our lives can only be expressed in understatement. It is the common denominator between everything that makes us who we are and everything that we could be. It is the originating basis for our will, our desires, and our cravings. It is the connecting bridge between our being, our existence, and our expression of so, our actions. It is the only evidence we have for us, ourselves, being here on this earth at this current point in time and perhaps for even an indefinite amount of time. And most importantly, it is the sole reason for our pleasure, which in turn, spawns our sole reasons for carrying on with our day-to-day lives, our reasons for loving, for caring, for trusting, for companionship, for service, and for just about any other virtuous act we can think of.

Thus, the human is not only an imaginary being (like all beings) but is one in which, for some reason or another, its processes of imagination form desires beyond the biological standard, beyond programming, and so it must then be true that the person is a being of this rather advanced variant of imagination processes, extensive imagination, that which had the ability to question its own actions and reasoning.

With that, I fear that there is no more need for evolution, for our development must be a metaphysical one, one in which we obtain the ability to develop ourselves towards our duties in a continuous fashion, to overcome any established limitations by seeing that they are so, and to strive for balance. Such is the essence of life, and the true reason for our being.¹¹

Imagination is the essence of humanity.

¹¹Simmel, Georg. "Life as transcendence." *The View of Life: Four metaphysical essays with journal aphorisms* (2010): 1-18.

Logical Summary

The following is a logical summary of the arguments made in this review for ease of access. Only basic forms of logic will be used for accessibility: Where I represents imagination (and $\ll I$ its extensive counterpart), C represents craving, C_n and C_s represent the "natural" and "supernatural craving", respectively, H represents humanity, D_p , D_m and D_i represent physical death, mental death, and divinity, respectively, L_m and L_p represent a mental and physical life, respectively.

$$\begin{aligned}
 I &\implies C \implies H : \\
 I &\implies C, \neg C \implies D_p \vee D_m \vee D_i, \neg C \implies \neg C_n \wedge \neg C_s, C \implies C_n \wedge C_s \\
 \neg C_n &\implies D_p \\
 \neg C_s &\implies D_m \vee D_i \\
 C_s &\implies \neg D_m \vee \neg D_i, C_s \implies L_m \vee H \\
 H &\implies L_m \wedge L_p \\
 C_s &\implies L_m \vee (L_m \wedge L_p) \\
 L_p &= T \text{ (a posteriori)} \\
 \ll I &\implies C_s
 \end{aligned}$$

$$\ll I \wedge L_p \implies L_p \wedge C_s \wedge C_n \implies L_m \wedge L_p \implies H$$

Q.E.D.