

EXT. MATT wakes up in the highlands of northern Ladakh, with a local guide making
coffee. He is dirty, with long hair and a thick beard.

Voiceover:

“awake.

A new day.

A new me.

A new life.

Begin.”

They have slept outdoors in the country; no civilization around for miles. They pack
their mule and begin walking through the landscape.

EXT. at sunset they reach a small village; some huts surrounding a road. They approach
a bus; the guide throws Matt’s pack on the top and they warmly shake hands. Matt gets
in the bus and smiles at the locals, who smile back. The sun sinks as the bus leaves.

INT. Matt wakes up in the interior of the bus; they are in a congested, crowded, city –
Delhi.

Voiceover:

“Awake.

A new day.

A new me.

A new life.

Begin.”

He gets his pack, walks the incredibly crowded streets and argues with a taxi driver, who drops him off at the airport. He boards a flight for Chicago.

INT Matt is sleeping on the plane

EXT a shot of the plane from an enormous distance away, from the surface of the ocean watching it as it traverses across the sky.

Voiceover

“Awake.

A new day.

A new me.

A new life.

Begin.”

He disembarks in Chicago, gets his luggage, and walks out the gate, where his family awaits. They don’t recognize him; apparently he has changed. His mother glances at him, then looks much harder. She recognizes him, and calls his name. He looks at them for a second, and then smiles.

Ext. night time in a residential neighborhood.

INT. Matt is in bed. He wakes up.

“Awak—“

he looks around at his surroundings. He looks at the bed, he touches his blanket.

EXT. Matt has left the house and is walking across uninhabited countryside, through a glade of trees towards a hill. He is wearing only the blanket from his bed.

Voiceover

“I came home in 2001 after having spent several years abroad. I had crossed many strange lands, I had met many fascinating people, and I had seen many wondrous things. I had explored, because I wanted to learn. Upon returning home, I looked for ways to share what I had learned in my travels, for what I had learned was important. How would I share? I thought about becoming a teacher. I thought about writing a book. And then I thought about writing a screenplay....

EXT. Matt stands on the hill, hands above his head as the sun rises

FLY

[Shot of solar system. Close-up of sun; camera zooms out to reveal earth. The earth rotates so that one can see North America just coming into the sun's rays; zoom in to...
[...Sunrise in Wyoming. Silhouette of Matt watching the sunrise over a field; he stands next to an old VW van sitting on a gravel road. He is wearing a casual suit. He no longer has the beard. He smiles, gets in the van, and begins to drive.

ROLL CREDITS

Van pulls into high school parking lot; young man goes into school along with kids.

INT. PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE

KNOCK on door, and MATT enters. MARY SCHENKEL, the principal, is seated at her desk, looking over something.

MATT: Heya, Mrs. Schenkel, how are you this morning?

MARY: [with resigned bemusement] Mr. Kelley. Quite well, thank you. And where is your tie, sir.

MATT: I couldn't decide. [pulls 2 garish ties from his pocket] Bugs bunny, or football helmets.

[Mary stares balefully at him. He sighs, and wistfully draws a respectable tie out of his pocket. She gleams in approval.]

MATT: Hey, did you see? I painted my van.

MARY: I saw. I am marginally impressed.

MATT: Marginally?

MARY: Don't get me wrong: it's much better than that 'puff the magic dragon' thing you had-

MATT: -wagon.

MARY: what?

MATT: -wagon. 'Puff the magic *wagon*. It's, you know, a *Volkswagen*...

MARY: [rolling eyes] I was hoping you might go for a little more neutral color.

MATT: [mock shock] you don't like it?! [feigns hurt] but it's ...so classy!

They both look out the window.

EXT. parking lot, their view. Students are standing around the van, looking at it as though it came from outer space.

INT. principal's office

Mary slowly turns her head and stares at Matt. He grins at her.

MARY: Ugh. Go. I'm busy. Hey –

MATT: yeah?

MARY: [smiling kindly] nervous?

MATT: [grins] piece of cake.

MARY: have a good first day.

MATT: Thank you.

Mary smiles and shakes her head after he leaves.

INT School hallway; just before the first day of school. Kids are passing by. MR. JOHN

DAVIS, a math teacher and the football coach, talks to students as they pass.

JOHN: Hey, Liz, good to see you again. Hey, there, Pete.

MATT: [posing with the correct tie] how's it look?

JOHN: Oh, man, I thought you were going with Bugs Bunny!

MATT: Man, I'm going to have her so mad at me soon enough, I see no reason to tick her off any earlier than necessary.

JOHN: oh, you can do no wrong with her. You're already her favorite and it's only the first day.

MATT: that's exactly it – wait 3 months and see how much she likes me.

BELL rings.

JOHN: Hey, have a good one. See you at lunch.

MATT: Yeah.

INT. Classroom. The bell rings again. Students sit at their desks quietly. Matt is sitting on the front of his desk. Straggling students come in briskly and sit down.

MATT: Hey, everyone, my name's Matt Kelley; Mr. Kelley's probably appropriate. I don't know anything about any of you, so we'll have to go around the room and do some introductions, so I guess I'll start off.

This is my first year teaching. And it's... a rotten job, I think. [class titters.] It doesn't pay dirt, I'm stuck here in the middle of nowhere, and I have to hang out with Mr. Davis at lunch. [more polite titters.]

This is the point at which you all ask, 'then why you are here, Mr. Kelley?' and here's why. I'm not here because I wanted a *job*. If I wanted a job, I'd be somewhere else. I'm here because I wanted to teach. Getting paid to do this is just a perk.

I've been trying to learn as much as I could the past few years; studying in different fields, under different teachers, in different locations. I've been exploring; trying to discover what's out there. And now, I figure its time to share what I've learned with others. I've seen, and done, and learned a lot of things that have really given me a lot of joy in my life, and I'm here because I want to share what I've discovered with people who might gain something from it. You.

I'm 25 years old. I've traveled across all the seven continents. I've lived with lots of different people in lots of different cultures, and I've studied from lots of different teachers. I've hitchhiked across Europe, and I've climbed in the Himalayas. I've hiked through jungles in Cambodia, and I've hiked through the mountains in Pakistan. I've watched the sun rise from the African Serengeti, and I've watched it set over the South Pole. I've set out to explore as much of this world as I could, to discover what's in the universe and to discover what's in me. And I've learned a great deal. And I want to

share what I've learned to young people, so that they might enter the world excited about being alive.

When I was 18, I looked and acted just like you guys. I was absolutely dying to get out there and make my mark; I wanted something, but I didn't know what. I wanted to have a great life, to have fantastic experiences. I wanted to be happy, I wanted to be a success. But I didn't know how to get started. It took me a while to figure these things out. It took me a long time – but I did do it. And so now I decided to become a teacher because I think I might be able to help you as you go about the business of deciding who you are and how you want to live. I'd like to share what I've seen, and what I've learned with you, and maybe you'll find it helpful in your lives.

Now, that's all just between you and me. Mrs. Schenkel hired me to teach, not all this 'help you with your lives' crap. So I am going to teach, but it's not going to be a normal class. This is Honors Lit, but I intend for this to be unlike any other class you've ever had. This year, we are going to look at the classics of the world and extract from them the History of Ideas. We're going to jump back and forth throughout time and across the globe, to trace the different ideas human beings have had, and why they're important. I don't care about dates, or style, or grammar – all I care about is ideas. And because I believe that schools exist not merely to prepare you for the job market but to give you a well-rounded education, we are going to take the unorthodox step of starting every class with one of you reciting something. [class groans] Yeah, yeah. C'mon, it's 30 seconds. You'll like it, I promise. A poem, or a quote, or a phrase, whatever suits you. I'll even help you out on picking what you want to recite. I know, it's terrible. Today being the first day, I'll start.

Come to the edge.

It's too high.

Come to the edge.

I might fall.

Come to the edge!

And they came

And he pushed

And they flew.

INT. Teacher's Lounge; several teachers are sitting or standing. John Davis and Matt Kelley are conversing in a corner. MRS. FRYER, an old, staunch teacher, approaches.

Mrs. Fryer: Well, Mr. Kelley, our new celebrity teacher.

Matt: Hello, Mrs. Fryer.

Mrs. Fryer: You've made quite an impression today. You've been labeled 'Mr. Adventure' by the students.

Matt: Well, you've been teaching for 25 years, I imagine that's an adventure itself.

Mrs. Fryer: it is, it is. Well, see you.

Matt: was that disapproval?

John Davis: I believe she thinks you're flighty.

Matt: compared to her, most things are, I imagine.

EXT. students are walking outside, class is out for lunch. Several different shots of gossiping girls, chatting teachers, and kids chucking a football. NATHAN, DAVE, ANDY, and PETE are laying on the grass, eating sandwiches. They are staring at a girl in

a short skirt with nice legs. She bends over to pick up a ball. The men collectively
groan.

Nathan: oh, man, she's killing me.

Andy: I'm telling you, in a swimsuit it is unbelievable.

Pete: For crying out loud, call me next time she sunbathes.

ALAN approaches the group with his lunch.

Alan: hey, guys.

Andy: get out of the way!

Alan: mmm.

Dave: Where were you?

Alan: I was talking with Mr. Kelley. Man, he is awesome!

Andy: We knew you'd go nuts over him.

Alan: Why?

Pete: he's right up your alley, man. Save the world, hug a tree, be a communist...

Alan: man, just because I happen to think it's important to have a voice in what's going
on around me...

Pete: oh, boy.

Alan: you guys just don't care about the world you're going to inherit.

Andy: Hey, we're with you man, relax...

Nathan: I think he's really cool, too, ok?

Dave: I really liked that poem he had.

Alan: yeah, that was really cool, wasn't it?

Pete: seemed pretty cheesy to me.

Nathan: you just didn't get it.

Pete: Fuck you.

Andy: See, there's this cliff, right? But it's not really a cliff at all

Pete: oh, man, somebody shut him up.

Alan: You know he spent a year at the South Pole?

Nathan: Who, Mr. Kelley?

Andy: What the hell for?

Alan: what do you mean what for? You know how few people have ever had a chance to do that? He's been to all over the whole world, man, and he has stories about living in a yoga ashram in India and living in a yurt in Tibet... he's frigging cool, man.

Pete: He's a damn hippy is what he is.

Dave: What did he do it all for?

Alan: Because he wasn't satisfied with getting up and going to work and coming home and watching tv and going to bed.

Pete: Man, this is just what we need; one of you was bad enough.

Alan: maybe you'll listen to him, at least.

Andy: poor neglected Alan.

Pete: he's a flake.

Dave: I like him.

Andy: That's saying a lot. When's the last time you ever *disliked* anyone? (dave smiles shyly) Hey (to Alan) – I was telling them, two weeks from now there's a party at the garage.

Alan: Oh, nice! I'm there. We've got to get that new girl to come.

Andy: that's my job, and I'm on it.

Pete: I think the Preacher has his eye on her. (everyone goads Dave.)

Nathan: she looks like a sinner, preach - I'd stay away.

Pete: oh, man, I'd give anything if she was a sinner.

Nathan: so there's this cliff, see, but it's not really a cliff, it's just a metaphor...

EXT. school is out; the bell rings and kids begin leaving. Matt gets in his van and starts to drive. He approaches a corner and pulls over, hollering at someone he sees.

Matt: Hello, Reverend!

PASTOR CHAD GRANBY: well, hello, Mr. Kelley! How did the first day go?

Matt: Good, thanks.

Pastor: haven't fired you yet?

Matt: not yet. It'll probably take em a month or so to figure me out.

Pastor: Give them time. I'll see you this Sunday, right?

Matt: My sanctuary doesn't have a door on it. I'll stop by for coffee sometime.

Pastor: Good.

The light changes, and Matt waves. Pastor waves back, and stares thoughtfully at the passing van.

Ext. Dinnertime; Schenkel household

INT. the Schenkel household; dinnertime in the kitchen. The Schenkel family is seated at the table eating dinner.

Jim: What did you think of your classes?

Nathan: They're good. Mr. Kelley's really cool! I didn't know that he'd done all that stuff, he's had an amazing life!

Mary: well, adventures aside, what do you think of him as a teacher?

Nathan: Well, he seems good. He had people excited about the class. It's going to be a class about great ideas, he said. He's got us interested, at least.

Mary: yeah, I went out a limb getting his course plan approved. He better not blow it.

Nathan: He gave us homework already.

Jim: Hey, he's alright it my book!

Mary: homework already?

Nathan: It's not due tomorrow.

Mary: When's it due?

Nathan: he said it took him 2 years to get the right answer, so we should expect to spend about that much time too.

Jim: He gave you homework that's due two years from now.

Nathan: Isn't that a kick?

Mary: what is it?

Nathan: I have to write down what I want my purpose in life to be.

Both parents stare at their son, as he smiles.

INT. kitchen Jim and Mary are finishing up the dishes

Jim: Mar, who is this guy and why do I have the impression he's a fruitcake?

Mary: Oh, Jim, you met him, you liked him, remember?

Jim: yeah, but man, doesn't that seem a little odd, homework due two years from now?

About his purpose in life? I'm 45 and I don't know my purpose in life.

Mary: that's the whole point, though, to get these kids to start thinking about what they want to do with themselves, to get them to choose their lives instead of having their choices made for them.

Jim: He sounds like a new age fruitcake to me.

Mary: I'm a little unsure of him, too, but he's inspired to get these kids interested in the world they're going to inherit, and in my book, that makes him a good teacher.

Jim: so purpose in life for homework?

Mary: Jim, these kids are growing up in a world that is completely different from the one we're used to. A lot of it doesn't make sense to me, but I'm convinced that this fruitcake has the ability to make these kids aware of the challenges that they're going to face.

They're going to be big challenges, and there aren't too many people who are interested in moving to Wyoming in order to teach high schoolers about them.

Jim: you're so cute when you get riled.

Mary: I'm not riled – oh you are simply intolerable.

EXT. in the mountains of Western Wyoming; a multi-pitch climb on a beautiful day.

JAN DAVENPORT and Matt are climbing. Several pitches are climbed, viewed from far away.

EXT. the two sit at a belay ledge before descending, watching the afternoon sun.

Jan: Can we use your house to get all the gear together?

Matt: sure.

Jan: You know, you still have an invitation to come with us if you want. There's nothing like the Himalayas in September.

Matt: Thanks, man, but I made my choice and I'm sticking with it.

Jan: High School teacher?

Matt: yup.

Jan: Why?

Matt: You remember professor Billip?

Jan: Yeah.

Matt: He had us write down what our goal in life was, remember?

Jan: No.

Matt: I do. I'm 21 years old, and I'm sitting in my room late at night, no lights, just a computer screen, and I write:

To explore this world, that I might learn what I can, in order to share it with those who would listen.

Jan: Time to share, eh?

Matt: Time to share.

EXT. Alan and Nathan and Dave are hiking.

Alan: They zoned the valley for real estate development. 3 years from now we'll be hearing cars drive up here.

Nathan: They call it progress, right?

Alan: Yeah. Everybody's getting richer and richer and everybody's getting more and more stuff and everybody's getting more and more miserable.

Dave: people aren't all getting more and more miserable.

Alan: No? We've got a 50% divorce rate. We've got 30% of the wealthiest class going to psychotherapy. You don't think we're miserable?

Dave: They're just searching.

Alan: Well whatever is their searching for, they think it has a price tag and they're trying to buy it. It can't be bought, it's not on sale. So everyone's miserable.

Nathan: and now, Alan will tell us why.

Alan: You patronize me all you want, you know I'm right. People think that money will make them happy. Every year the GDP goes up, and we all say that's a good year. The economy is doing well, the market is booming. Economic growth is the name of the game. but car wrecks are good for the economy. Divorces are good for the economy. Every house that burns down and every chemotherapy treatment is good for the economy. No wonder we're miserable. We're trying to improve the wrong thing. Progress isn't a better economy, progress is less car wrecks and less divorce and less chemo. Real progress would be bad for the economy. We've got our priorities all screwed up.

Nathan: Where'd you get all this stuff?

Alan: The library, bonehead. It makes sense, doesn't it?

Nathan: I'm going fishing.

Alan: how can you not get worked up over this?

Nathan makes a point of looking around at the beautiful weather and scenery.

Alan: Ok.

Shot of the mountains, just before sunrise. Matt is hiking up a mountain. He climbs a pillar, and assumes the lotus position. Shot of Matt meditating among majestic natural scenery.

INT. Matt's classroom, class in session

Matt: Socrates: What is the Best Life, and how does man achieve it? When I ask you what you want your purpose in life to be, I'm basically asking you this question. What is the best life you can possibly live? What steps do you need to take in order to live that life? Socrates asked this question. He didn't answer it. Neither can I. I have an opinion. And I might even be right. But it doesn't matter what I think – I'm trying to get you to think. When a teacher tells you what to think, you know they're doing it wrong. A teacher should show you how to think, and you can come to your own conclusions. What is the best life you can live? How are you going to achieve that life? This is the fundamental question that lies at the heart of every decision you make, how you interact with people, what goals you strive for, what ills you avoid, what you fear, what you admire – this is the question of How To Live, and the great minds of humankind have been wrestling with it since the very beginning of recorded time. Every topic you study in school, every article you read about in the newspaper, is an attempt to answer this question. History – that's just the story of all the people who have tried to achieve the best life. Political science is just the study of individuals who aspire to live the best life interacting together. Literature, poetry, and art, are all just forms in which we celebrate the best life, redefine it, and critique it sometimes. Even science – the study of how the universe operates, is only studied because we think it's worth learning – because we think knowing it is better than not knowing it. In other words, because we think that knowing how the universe works is the Right Way to Live. Now, I for one am a big proponent of scientific enquiry, because it enables us to discover Truth, and Truth is the one thing we have in the Universe that we as a species can cling to. It doesn't make much sense to sacrifice a bull to a sun-god when you know that you live on a planet orbiting a star.

Now, what I'm saying might seem ridiculously obvious so far, but ask yourself why China existed for 1500 years as the pinnacle of enlightened culture and yet never accepted the principle of scientific enquiry? They didn't pursue scientific enquiry – they condemned it. They condemned it because they thought that knowing the truth made people rethink the question of How to Live, and there is nothing messier than a society that is not sure of what it is trying to accomplish. Someone stands up and says, “hey, we're all living the wrong way” and you can imagine the chaos. The Chinese, keen observers of human nature that they were, sought to avoid that messiness. It didn't work; truth has a way of making itself noticed.

The pursuit of Truth, and the questioning of How we are to Live, are recent arrivals in the arena of human thought. And they are ideas that lots of people resent. In modern society, we want it both ways: We want to pursue truth, but we aren't terribly excited when someone comes along and tells us that we need to change How we Live. Can you think of any examples of people who have told society that they are living the Wrong Way?

Alan: Socrates.

Matt: How did society react?

Alan: they had him killed.

Matt: anyone else?

Dave: Jesus.

Matt: They killed him too. If you were living the wrong way, and someone told you it was time to change, how would you react?

Ext. the Schenkel house, what appears to be a Saturday afternoon. Cars are parking in the driveway, and it appears to be something of a get-together.

Int. Schenkel house; people are mingling. It is a teacher's back-to-school potluck. A couple walks in and gives their hellos.

Mary: Hey, guys. Put your food wherever, drinks are in the kitchen.

Mary grabs Sandra from a group she is talking with

Mary: (quietly) how's it going?

Sandra: is the mystery date here?

Mary: rolls her eyes resignedly

Sandra: you know, there's a rumor going around that he's a bit... out there.

Mary: well, he's definitely not average. What did you hear?

Sandra: I heard he's nutty as a fruitcake.

Mary: Dammit, don't hang around with Jim. I need to mute that boy.

Sandra: He actually told me we would be a great match.

Mary: did he?

Sandra: yeah. He said, 'the odds are awfully good because the goods were awfully odd.'

Mary: shit. Oh, here he is. C'mon.

Matt enters

Mary: glad you were able to drag yourself away from saving the rainforest.

Matt: I cancel big plans to be here, and this is the greeting I get.

Mary: yeah, yeah. What did you bring?

Takes his dish

Matt: sprouts and tofu.

Mary glares at him

Matt: sweet potatoes.

John Davis comes in from the kitchen

John: Hey, man! Good to see you. Have a beer. Hey, Sandy.

Matt: See? That's the way to greet a guest.

Mary: Get over it.

John: Yeah, I thought you had plans for this weekend?

Matt: I did, but she pleaded with me, she said it was important.

John: What's so important about it?

Everyone slowly looks at Sandra

John: Oh! Er- I- um ..Ha! I mean, I'm going to get another beer.

Matt and Mary exchange looks

Mary: Matt, Sandra.

Sandra: call me Sandy.

Matt: call me fruitcake.

Mary: you are utterly hopeless. I don't know why I bother. I'm going to check on the drinks

Mary leaves

Matt: did I just get set up?

Sandra: yeah. Don't flatter yourself; I've been desperate for years now.

Matt: yeah, I suspected as much.

Ext. early evening, back porch of the Schenkel house. Matt and Sandra are watching the sunset.

Sandra: So how much time have you spent away from America?

Matt: Off and on since I was 21, I guess.

Sandra: How did it all start?

Matt: long story.

Sandra: yeah, you're right, this is a really bad time to hear about it...

Matt: ok, ok. It's hard to know how it began. I grew up in a small town in the Midwest, and life was pretty much set out for me. There was this unspoken expectation that you would study hard, graduate, get a good job, get married, have a family, and that's it.

There seemed to be this built-in pressure that I had to follow the path that society had picked out for me. It was almost as if the world decided what a successful life was, and I didn't have a say in it. I was 18, I wanted something magical, something profound, something adventurous. But there was no place to find it; not where I was growing up. I had all this energy, and I didn't know what direction to go in. All I could do was follow the lead of everyone else. I wanted to know what it takes to lead a fulfilling life, and so looked at society. And society says, to have a fulfilling life, you need to have a high paying job in an office, a big house, an expensive car, lots of toys, stock investments, the works. This is how America seems to define success in life – at least it was how my community defined it. So I bought it. I didn't know what path to follow, I didn't have any guides to help me, so I bought this story and I put all my energy into being a 'success'. And I wasn't happy. It didn't suit me at all. I just killed time in college, trying to become this thing I despised. This idea of 'success' that modern society endorses didn't fulfill me. And so somewhere along the line, I decided that modern America had made a big mistake somewhere. The modern world had somehow selected

the wrong things as worthy goals. People want to be happy, and we're told that a flash car and a big tv and trendy clothes and a high-paying 60hr a week job are the things that will make us happy but it's not true. The concept of a successful life is being determined for us, instead of giving us the opportunity to define it for ourselves. And so when I was 21, I decided that I wasn't going to accept the standard definition of success. I was going to find my own concept of success, and pursue that, even if it differed from what everybody else thought a successful life was. So I sat down, and I thought about all the things I wanted to do in my life, and I wrote them down on a piece of paper. Then I took another piece of paper, and I wrote down all the things that were stopping me from pursuing these goals. And I still have these two lists; one of them keeps getting longer and longer, and the other one is still blank.

Int. Saturday night at the Garage; a large mellow party is taking place. Andy, Alan, Pete, Dave, and Nathan are all present, among others. Andy, Pete and Dave are talking together in a big group.

Andy: gentlemen. (hands out beers) Dave, would you care to indulge?

Dave: no thanks.

Andy: Someday, maybe? Before we graduate?

Dave: When we graduate, I'll get drunk with you.

Andy: That's a deal.

Pete: To the last hurrah.

All: The last hurrah.

Andy: Ah, there's young Miss Jenkins; I have some work to attend to.

Pete: there's a surprise. C'mon, lets go find Nate.

Ext. nighttime; the party is audible from outside a barn in the country. Several people
can be seen. Nathan and Alan are looking at the stars.

Nathan: This is the end of it, man. This is our last year of the good life.

Alan: no man, what are you talking about? It's the beginning! After this, we're free. No more horseshit brainwashing they call education. Selective studies about how good it is to be rich and American, and how much better it would be if we could only afford to buy more things. We get to choose who we're going to be. I can't wait to be able to disagree and not be labeled troublemaker.

Nathan: you'll always be labeled troublemaker.

Alan: if you want things to improve, you have to change the status quo, right? We finish high school, the world is ours to pick from. Whatever we want; nothing is stopping us! Be a Senator, or an astronaut, or cure cancer, whatever. It's all there, man, all we have to do is choose. Once we're finished here, we get our chance, our first real chance, to chase down our own life. And nothing is stopping us, you know?

Nathan: Yeah, I know.

Alan: you think I'm wrong?

Nathan: no, I think you're right. For you. Just not for me.

Alan: that's horseshit.

Nathan: Robinson fucking Crusoe. You just want this big adventure.

Alan: You don't?

Nathan: Hell, I don't know. That's the whole problem. How am I expected to know what I want? How am I supposed to know what I want out of life? Man, I want – I don't even know.

Alan: I don't know either, man.

Nathan: yeah, you do! You're going to save the world, stop pollution, reinvent capitalism, you have a direction you want to take, I don't even have that!

Alan: then pick one!

Nathan: that's what I'm talking about; how do I pick one! I don't which direction to go!

Alan: man, pick any one; and if it's wrong, just change it. You don't have to stick with it forever. I don't have clue where I'll be in 20 years. But I'm not worried about it; because I can choose what I want along the way. It's just this great big adventure, man – we wake up, and we go outside, and say, 'what will I do' – and then we do it! You can climb Everest, or you can be an astronaut, or you can cure cancer, or you can be a senator, or a writer – whatever the hell you want to do, nothing is going to stop you!

Nathan: That's the difference between us. Neither one of us knows what to do with ourselves. It makes you happy, and it scares the hell out of me. Alan: the secret is in here (points to his bottle)

Pete and Dave enter

Pete: what's up, guys?

Nathan: we discovered the secret to life.

Pete: A vagina? Where?

Nathan: speaking of which, where's Andy?

Dave: he was hitting on that Jenkins girl when we left.

Alan: Let's run some interference!

INT. the 4 boys are standing in the doorway, laughing at what they see.

Angle changes to show the new girl smiling as she dances with...someone else.

Andy sits dismally in a corner. Seeing the guys, he grins, throws his beer and they all
head outside.

EXT. the 5 boys are wading through a stream, under a night of brilliant stars, whooping
and hollering.

EXT. early morning just at sunrise. Matt is standing in the forest, practicing tai chi.

INT. Matt is teaching in his classroom

Matt: Sartre: To answer the Question of How to Live is to answer the question of what
is right and what is wrong. To decide How to Live is to decide what is good and what is
evil. To find the best life, we must have...Dave?

Dave: Value

Matt: Value is the framework by which we live. It is embodied in a culture, built into
our social fabric and rarely questioned. But different cultures do have different value
systems; ethical beliefs vary widely from place to place. In the western world, it is
abhorrent to consider killing and eating an enemy, but in *¹ tribe it is accepted and
approved as an appropriate morally sound act. The values we have in 21st century
America are exactly that – 21st century American values. They are very different from
the values held in Ming Dynasty China, or Medieval Europe, or the present day Middle
East, or America in the 18th century. And rest assured, they are very different from the
values America will hold in the centuries to come.

¹ Cannibal tribe

Is there any value that is universal? Is there any moral law that no society ever breaks?

Nathan: Murder.

Matt: let's start off with something easier to get our mind around. How about the right to own things? Private property. Is this universal?

Pete: no. communism. (glares at Alan, who rolls his eyes)

Alan: I'm not a frigging communist.

Matt: right, right. Private property is not a universal value. we think it should be, other people think it shouldn't be. Are you with me? Ok – let's try murder. Is this universal?

Is there a society, or have there been societies, or is it conceivable that there will be societies, that condone murder?

Dave: Yes. Terrorists.

Matt: Are they a society? Er. Are they a culture? Um. Do they endorse killing people? Yes. But I'm looking for something a lot more obvious. Is there, or has there ever been, or is it conceivable that there someday will be, a culture that accepts killing people? That killing people is necessary?

Alan: Yes.

Matt: yes?

Alan: Ours.

Matt: We call it war. Anyone going into the army? Our government will train you to kill, it will give you the tools to kill, and if you're very good at it, you will get a medal and maybe even a parade. Look at it this way: does your value system say that it is

sometimes permissible to kill someone else? Is murder sometimes ok? If someone breaks into your house, what do you do? How do you live? OK do you agree or disagree; that's assignment #1. Moving on. Every condemnable act that our current value system recognizes is condoned in some alternative value system. Gender equality? Read the Iliad; Achilles pouts on the beach because his war booty – a pretty girl named *² gets handed off to another man. Rape is even in the Bible; *³ states that pretty clearly. Slavery? Check out Greece, Rome, the U.S. 150 years ago. Are there any values that don't ever change? I don't think so, am I right or wrong? That's assignment #2. Likewise, many of the actions that we consider virtuous have been condemned by other societies. Examples?

Andy: dancing.

Pete: Oh my god.

Matt: it's funny, but it's true. Our own great nation thought that dancing was the work of the devil not so long ago! Values change. Others?

Nathan: sex.

Matt: oh, we're getting on thin ice, here. Think 'Little house on the Prairie'. Was casual sex as acceptable back then as it is now? What about living together before marriage? Interracial marriages. Homosexuality. Perfectly normal in ancient Greece, not an option in medieval Europe, and everybody has a different answer today. What's acceptable changes.

Think about our value system: can you imagine what might be considered wrong in later generations? Will eating meat be condemned in the future? What about using gasoline?

² Iliad – Achilles' spoils

³ Bible verse condoning rape

Will abortion be considered wrong? What about the act of sex? Will having children continue to be a right, or will it become a privilege? What values will our society adopt, and what criteria will we use when we do so?

When we ask the question of How we are to Live, we are asking the question: What values are we to live by? In this world of limitless values, which code do we accept as the correct one? The code we have inherited? Many, perhaps most, Americans would consider the Christian code, endorsed by our founding fathers and passed down among the generations, to be the legitimate answer to the question of what is Right and what is Wrong, but what makes them so sure? Every society that has ever been in existence has argued the same thing: *our values are sacred, they were passed on by God, they can't be wrong, they can't change.* And yet everyone one of them has. And ours will too.

How do we know what is right and what is wrong? What code do you live by, and why do you live by it?

Ext. It is late September; the weather is getting cooler and it's autumn. The leaves are turning , and various shots depict the change of the seasons. Shot changes to show Matt's house, a little cottage out in the woods. Several hard-driven 4x4s and vans are sitting outside the house, and there seems to be a sense of bustle as several people cart what appears to be mountaineering equipment back and forth. Jan is talking with Matt about what appears to be an expedition that he is going to be taking part in.

Matt: How much food are you taking?

Jan: Those bins there. Enough for 4 weeks.

Matt: what about fuel?

Jan: We'll pick up kerosene in Namche Bazaar, and we have some cylinders. Hey, can I borrow your light stove?

Matt: Yeah, it's in with the other kitchen stuff. Hang on.

Ext. driveway Sandra pulls up. Matt approaches her car.

Sandra: Hey. What's going on?

Matt: Some friends of mine are using my place to get organized for a trip to Nepal.

Sandra: They're going to climb mountains?

Matt: Yup.

Sandra: And you can't go, can you.

Matt: Sure I can. I just don't want to. I'd rather teach.

Sandra: yeah, right.

Jan approaches

Jan: hello, I'm Jan.

Sandra: Hi. Sandy.

Jan: Yeah, I know. He's told me about you.

Sandra: So you're off to Nepal, eh?

Jan: Yes indeed. Going to have ourselves a climb, if the gods are willing.

Sandra: that's an awful lot of stuff you have just to climb a mountain.

Jan: Yeah, it's a pretty ridiculous endeavor, when you stop to think about it. A whole lot of work, and time, and energy, and money, and the best possible outcome is that you end up right where you started off. Shocking. I try not to think about it too much.

Sandra: why do you do it?

Jan: (blank look) MY BRAIN IS MELTING!! MUST FLEE!

Jan leaves

Sandra: Lots of stuff. How come they're doing it here?

Matt: Where else are they going to do it?

Sandra: Their own house, I would think.

Matt looks at her, and then looks pointedly at the vehicles lining his drive. Upon
scrutiny, it is apparent that they are not just rides, but homes.

Sandra: oh, man.

Matt laughs and walks away

EXT. Matt and Sandra are walking in the woods. They approach a glade, where Matt
stops and waits for Sandra to catch up. This is apparently their destination; a beautiful
view.

Matt: it's nice, eh?

Sandra: Incredible. You come up here everyday?

Matt: I try to. I don't have much a life, really. C'mon.

Ext. the two are having lunch in a secluded glade.

Sandra: So be serious. Do you wish you were going with Jan?

Matt: A part of me does.

Sandra: why?

Matt: it's a beautiful mountain, and a challenging climb.

Sandra: No, I mean – why do you do this? What possesses people like you and Jan, that
makes you live so much closer to the edge than the rest of us? You heard him, didn't
you, he couldn't come up with an answer. If you're just going to end up where you
started from; what's the point?

Matt: You've just described life. Do you see? There is no thing in this universe that we get to take with us when we go.

Sandra: is that why you live as you do?

Matt: We need adversity in life. A life where adversity is avoided is not nearly as fulfilling as one where adversity is overcome.

Sandy: you're a masochist.

Matt: no. When we stop challenging ourselves, we shut down inside; we just go through the motions of being alive. I never want to lead the kind of life where everyday is the same as the last one, and every month is the same as the last one, and every year...

Sandra: some people need that. It's called security.

Matt: Oh, I know all about security. You heard the story about Rodney Marks, didn't you?

Sandra: I know a little. You've never talked about it, but I've been curious.

Matt: I was there for the whole year of 2000, and for me that year doesn't exist. Because there is no such thing as time down there. There were 48 of us, and we'd get up in the morning, and go outside, and it was always midnight. We spent 6 months without a sunrise or a sunset, no trees, no birds, no insects, nothing. Just this expanse of ice, big as the sea, and stars, big as a universe. 100 degrees below zero, no one else around for 1,000 miles. It's The south pole, but it might as well be the moon. Every day, we had infinity right in front of our eyes. And time stopped for us. A day? What's a day? There's no sunrise to mark its beginning, or sunset to mark its end; time becomes a human invention, nothing more.

The 48 people became so intimately familiar with each other that they could read each other's mind. You said that some people are really comfortable with the same days following one another, because they feel security in the familiar. Man, life down there was so secure, because nothing changed. You ate the same bland food and saw the same people and witnessed the same unblinking gaze of the midnight sky, and you got so comfortable with this sameness that a part of you didn't want the year to be over because then life had choices needing to be made, and responsibilities that required tough decisions, and you just wanted to stay in this comfort zone the rest of your life. It was autopilot, and you didn't want new people to arrive, because they were an invasion into your comfort zone. You didn't like them and you didn't trust them and you just wanted to turn yourself invisible and keep time frozen because it was something NEW, and you were so accustomed to life being the same.

But life isn't the same. Not here, and not in Antarctica. We buried Rodney Marks in the ice, right next to the south pole. He was 31, and he woke up feeling kind of funny, and his heart just stopped, and we tried cpr, but he was dead before dinner. There was nothing anybody could have done; just lousy fortune. But talk about throwing a wrench into this whole idea of life being the same. One of these people that you're so intimately familiar with is just gone? He just stopped being around? Talk about dealing with change – it was really hard, for everyone down there, because we all thought that change didn't have to be a part of life. And this was a great big ugly lesson that change IS a part of life; change is the essential part of life. If you resent change, if you can't handle it, then this is going to be one helluva bad time. Because change is the basis of existence. Your parents, your spouse, and even your kids are going to die someday. Your looks are

going to go, your eyesight, your health. Everything that you cherish will be lost eventually. The only thing to do is accept it. Accept change. More than that; we need to embrace change if we hope to be content in life. We need to train ourselves to expect change at every moment; to revel in it, because change means we're not dead yet! There is only one thing in all of existence that is permanent, and it gnaws on the bones of those who would give anything to have another chance.

I met Englishman on the coast of Australia, and one night when it was raining, we listened to someone playing the didgeridoo and he told me that he traveled because he was afraid of having one year turn into the next, and the only way he could prevent this from happening was to keep challenging himself, to keep putting himself out there, in the vivid realm, where everything is new and frightening and wonderful.

So I try to continually change, I try to continue putting myself in positions that I have never been in before, because it's a wonderful experience, it's...can you imagine what it's like to get dropped off in the middle of Kathmandu at midnight and you're all alone? Can you imagine what it's like to be stopped by kids with guns on a dirt road in Cambodia while riding on the back of a pickup truck? Can you picture having your tent and your stove and your food fall into a river in Tibet, and you're completely alone, a three day walk from the next closest human being, who's a yak herder? Can you see how silly so many American worries seem after facing these challenges and overcoming them? I heard a quote once, from a girl in a seedy bookstore in Bangkok. An investment in Life is an investment in Change, so that's what I try to do.

EXT. Alan and Nathan are fly fishing on a beautiful autumn day. Next to the river there is a short steep cliff; maybe 30-40 feet. The two boys walk towards each other.

Alan: Nothing's biting anymore.

Nathan: Nothing's been biting all day. You're just bored.

Alan: I feel like doing something.

Nathan: We are doing something.

They look at each other. Alan smiles and nods at the cliff.

Nathan: (disbelievingly) climb it.

Alan: yeah.

Nathan: No.

Alan: c'mon – (interrupted)

Nathan: NO.

Alan: OK. Suit yourself. (heads off as if to climb.)

Nathan: Alan.

Alan: yes?

Nathan: (angrily) get over here.

Alan: Oh, c'mon! This might be the last time we get out here this year; don't you want to Do Something, something memorable? How many chances are we going to have?

Let's do something great today!

Nathan: Jesus, what's wrong with you? You're turning into a wild man! You're getting self-destructive, almost. What is wrong with you?

Alan: I'm so fucking tired of spinning my wheels. I need... to do something important, I need to be important. I need...

Nathan: to justify your life.

Alan: yes! That's it precisely. I've been given all these gifts and I need to do something with it.

Nathan: (shrugging at the surroundings, and his fly rod) we are, man.

Alan: no, that's not enough. Don't you see? Man, it's like the whole world is spinning out of control, and nobody has a grasp of what's happening, things are changing so fast and so profoundly. And instead of working on it and making it a priority, everyone is dedicated to ignoring it as much as possible. We're trying to pretend it's not happening! It makes me nuts. I want to make a difference, I want to change the way things work, and nobody cares! Nobody seems to mind the obvious fact that the world cannot continue as it is! There are too many people. Inequality is getting exponentially worse, not better.

The rich have too much influence and the poor have too little. The have exploit the have-nots, and the have-nots retaliate out of resentment. How many wars are going on currently, and how many people give a shit about what their aim is and what their results are? We're so complacent, we're letting things head off in a direction we're not choosing just because we can't be bothered working for change. We're wrecking the planet because being responsible is too much hassle, and we aren't concerned with solving problems until it becomes too late.

Nathan: you need to stop hanging around Mr. Kelley so much.

Alan: This isn't about him at all! This is what I think! It's what you think too, when you think about it. Everybody feels it some way or another; "things are NOT under control, but someone else will take care of it." Society doesn't have a goal, and it really needs one. And nobody wants us to talk about it! The news, the papers, the politicians, every information source we have is trying to convince us that everything is just fine, all we

need to do is relax and keep doing what we've been doing. I know better, man, you know better, just about everyone knows better but nobody wants to act because it's so difficult to change. I can see through all the shit they're feeding us, but I don't know what to do! I need to do something. I need to make a difference.

Nathan: so what do we do? Climb a fucking cliff?

Alan: Yeah, I know. That was a pretty stupid idea, wasn't it? I don't know what we do.

Nathan: go in the right direction man, or you're going to end up wasting yourself.

Alan: so what's the right direction? What do we do if we're fed up with this fake reality?

Ext. the boys look at each other, with no answer available.

EXT: camera shows nature scene, boys are not visible

Voiceover

Alan: Tell me what to do

EXT camera shows planet earth in orbit

Voiceover

Nathan: Tell me how to live

INT. classroom, matt is teaching. John Davis knocks on the door.

John Davis: Excuse me.

Matt: One second. (walks into the hallway.)

Matt: what's up?

John. You're needed down in the office.

Matt: why?

John: Alan Swanson just told Mrs. Fryer to fuck herself.

Matt: Oh, shit. What was she talking about?

John: the industrial revolution.

Matt: Dammit. You'll take this?

John: yeah. Go.

INT. Mrs. Schenkel's office. Matt knocks and enters

Matt: Hello.

Mrs. Schenkel: you know why you're here?

Matt: yes.

Mrs. Schenkel: you made this mess. Clean it up. (pressed intercom button). Send Alan Swanson in, please.

Alan enters.

Mrs. Schenkel: Why are you here, Alan?

Alan: Because the truth-

Matt: Don't.

Alan: I spoke the truth-

Matt: don't justify your actions that way.

Alan: She got angry with me!

Mrs. Schenkel: why?

Alan: she was teaching about how the industrial revolution had been so great for America, how it had create so much wealth and make everybody's life better, and I told her that it just wasn't true. The industrial revolution made a couple dozen people incredibly rich and indentured just about everyone else. It was one of the most corrupt, exploitive periods in American history. And I told her this, and she got mad.

Matt: so?

Alan: so I got mad too! She's supposed to be a teacher, and she's lying to people! She's brainwashing them so that they'll grow up to be supporters of the American way-

Mrs. Schenkel: You verbally attacked her, Alan. You were cruel, and rude, and disrespectful. And you're going to be suspended for it.

Alan: Fine.

Matt: I agree with the punishment, Mrs. Schenkel, but I don't think Alan does. Do you?

Alan: Don't I have the right to expect the truth in public education?

Matt: Sure. And if you don't get it, you can voice your dissatisfaction. That's the beauty of being free. But that's not what you did. You thought your war was just, so you fought a dirty battle. Do you see where you messed up? Sometimes it's just and necessary to attack and reject a thing, but one is never justified in attacking or rejecting a person.

That's not me, that's Gandhi. In 1998⁴ the Friends of the Earth burned down a ski resort because they thought that the resort was doing bad things to the environment. Were they right? Were they?

Alan: no.

Matt: why not?

Alan: a noble cause doesn't justify dirty tactics.

Matt: there's a very thin line between being a social activist and a criminal. Remember the Unabomber? There has never been a single problem that was solved by anger. Now you're going to serve a 3 day suspension whether you want to or not. But there are two other things you need to do that are entirely up to you. You know what they are?

⁴ what year and who?

Alan: Apologize to Mrs. Fryer.

Matt: and the other?

Alan: ?

Matt: don't ever do this again.

Alan: I'm sorry.

Mrs. Schenkel: you can go.

Matt: What?

Mrs. Schenkel: you must very proud. Your protégé is coming along nicely.

Matt: Mary, he's not my protégé.

Mrs. Schenkel: Oh, he's not?

Matt: no.

Mrs. Schenkel: you are molding him.

Matt: I'm not molding him. He's a lot like I was, Mary, and I'm trying to give him some of the guidance that I really needed and didn't have.

Mrs. Schenkel: I'm really starting to question the guidance you think he needs.

Matt: did I handle it that badly?

Mrs. Schenkel: No. you handled it fine. But he wouldn't even be in here if it hadn't been for you influencing him to seek the truth and challenge convention!

Matt: That's where you're wrong. He would have. He, and a million other kids his age are fed up with society's complete absence of direction, and they are lashing out in all kinds of ways. You know this, you've read the papers. He's an intelligent kid, and intelligent kids are starting to reject a society that's trying to convince them to live in a

manner that won't make them happy. And I wonder when we stopped talking about Alan and started talking about your own son.

Mrs. Schenkel: I am very concerned about the impact you are having on my son.

Matt: If I were you, I would be far more concerned about the impact people like Mrs. Fryer have on your son. Because make no mistake, she is leaving just as big a mark as I. Is that what you want?

INT. Matt leaves the office, while Mrs. Schenkel frowns.

EXT. early morning, just at sunrise. Matt is practicing yoga.

INT. classroom, matt is teaching

Matt: Darwin: What is a conscience? When we consider the Right way to live, we have a valuable tool we can use; we have a built-in compass that tells us what right and wrong are. A conscience is a built-in alarm that goes off when we stray from the path of the right way to live. Right? Where does a conscience come from? How did we come to have it? What is it there for? In our search for a right way to live, does it show us the way?

Dave: yes.

Matt: We've been raised to think so. But think in terms of evolution. How could something like a conscience come to be if we really evolved from less intelligent species? And emotions, for that matter; why would we evolve emotions? What is a conscience, basically?

Student #1 Guilt.

Right. Lets start off with something a little easier, though. Somebody name an emotion, an obvious one, that we can think on.

Student#2 Love.

OK. The big one. Why would we evolve love? Doesn't have much to do with a conscience, but it's a good start. Should be fairly easy, really. Any guesses?

Alan: Parents who love their kids are more likely to keep their kids alive, thus passing on their genes.

Right. Does that make sense? Say you have 5 families of apes, and only one of these families loves each other – particularly, the parents love their kids. These parents are going to be more likely to prevent their kids from being eaten by a lion, or from dying of exposure, or from getting hurt falling off a rock. So, these kids are more likely to make it to adulthood, so trait is pretty likely to get passed on. If one of those families had a trait that made them think that watching their kid get eaten by a lion was a strapping good time, would this trait be successful?

Nathan: No

Matt: Why not?

Nathan: Because any family that liked watching its kids get eaten wasn't going to have a whole lot of reproductive success, so their genes won't get passed on all that well.

Matt: Right. This is natural selection. So – let's look at a conscience again. Any ideas?

How would a conscience come into existence?

Well, think about this. Why would we evolve... loyalty? Anyone?

This is evolution, remember. That means it doesn't have much to do with cities, or pollution, or the stock market. Think lions. Why would lions display loyalty?

Nathan: Because they're all the same family.

Matt: Explain.

Alan: A mother would defend her cubs because natural selection...

Matt: Confers competitive advantage.

Alan: But that same mother would defend some other cubs in the pack because even if they're not her cubs, they'll be her sister's cubs or her cousin's cubs or her aunts cubs and so they still have a lot of her same genes so it will still ...confer competitive advantage.

Andy: Man I'm so confused.

Matt: Ok. Let's say (chalkboard) lion #1 has a mutant gene. This gene says 'be loyal!' to everybody? No – be loyal to your community, be suspicious of everything else. So. Lion # 1 gets old, lazy, content, she dies, but she dies with heaps of grandchildren, etc. These grandchildren grow up, have kids of their own, blah blah, so finally, one day, with this 'be loyal' gene in their family, a hyena attacks. Now, because of this 'loyal' gene, mom # 1 fights to the death with this hyena, even though she doesn't even have kids. and even though she's tough and fearless, and she kills the hyena, she's so doggone loyal that she sustains a mortal injury and dies at the same time as the hyena. This loyalty gene is going to survive and prosper, because even though it made mom #1 commit suicide (not competitive advantage material) it saved the lives of all the other cubs and so she successfully passes on that 'loyal' gene – as well as lots of others – through her sister's and cousins cubs. Wonderful! That's very good. So lions show loyalty – that is, they stick up for each other in the face of adversity or danger from outside – because it's beneficial for the genes. Even if their genes are being passed on in their cousins' kids instead of theirs.

So – why a conscience?

Nathan: Because if you were supposed to be loyal, and you weren't, that would be bad for your genes. You wouldn't save the kids of your pack, or whatever, so you would end up hurting your genes chances.

Matt: So... if something came along, a red light in the corner of your eye that went crazy every time you failed to be loyal, something that irritated you so much you swore to never be disloyal again, that red light would be an evolutionary advantage, right?

Maybe, just maybe, that red light is guilt.

How many people feel guilty about speeding? Who are you disloyal to?

How many people would feel guilty about speeding if they caused an accident in which a couple of kids died?

How many people would feel guilty about speeding if the kids were your sister's?

Maybe a conscience is an evolved mechanism that checks our tendency to hurt community members in ways we otherwise would be tempted to get away with.

So, what is a conscience? A moral compass, divinely inspired, that tells us what is right and what is wrong? Or an evolutionary adaptation that is programmed to influence our emotions so that we act in a manner which is advantageous to our genes? Does our conscience tell us the right way to live? Or doesn't it?

Ext. The group of boys is at lunch; they are talking animatedly. It is apparent that Alan is lecturing Dave and Nathan, who are dubious. Dave seems especially distraught.

Alan: (very excited) see, so since men can – in theory reproduce as much as they can, and women can only reproduce at max once every 9 months, it would make sense for men to have evolved with a gene that says, “go out and screw everything you see!” because that gene would do pretty well. But it makes sense for women to have evolved a

gene that says, “be selective! You only have one shot a year at this, make sure you get it right!” See?

Andy: sure. Men want to sleep with everything in sight because we evolved that way!

Alan: right, and women are playing hard to get, and they’re always being teases, because they evolved that way!

Pete: where do you get this stuff?

Andy: the booklist Kelley gave us at the beginning of the year, you schmo.

Nathan: let me see that.

Dave: Does it bother you at all, Nathan?

Nathan: yeah, it does.

Andy: what?

Dave: He’s basically teaching that there’s not a God.

Pete and Andy: whoa!

Alan: no, that’s not what he’s teaching. Look, man, you accept evolution don’t you.

Don’t you? Nathan, help me out here.

Nathan: Yeah, I accept evolution. But that doesn’t mean...

Alan:(cuts him off) yes, it does. If you accept the fact that we evolved from monkeys, that evolved from fish, whatever, then you have to accept it the whole way. It means that things like love, and honor, and gratitude, and spirituality, and our brains, and our emotions, are just evolutionary adaptations.

Dave: I don’t want to hear this.

Alan: Listen, man, what about DNA?

Dave: I don’t care, I don’t want to hear this.

Alan: our DNA is closer to chimpanzees than rats are to mice –

Dave: I said, I DON'T WANT TO HEAR THIS! I don't – I'm not going to hear this.

Ext. outside the school, which is finished for the day. Matt is walking down the sidewalk
to his car, he slows when he sees Dave standing next to it.

Matt: Hello, Dave.

Dave: Mr. Kelley, are you a Christian?

Matt: Let's go for a walk.

Dave: Answer the question, please.

Matt: Dave, this is goi –

Dave: ANSWER THE – answer the question, please.

Matt: No, I am not a Christian.

Long silence

Matt: Gandhi wasn't, either.

Dave: you're not Gandhi.

Matt: I know; point is, just because someone isn't Christian, that doesn't mean they're a bad person. For what it's worth, I admire Jesus a lot, I think he was a remarkable human being, and I try to live in a manner that he would approve of, and I try to act in ways that he would be proud of. It's just that I think he was a great human being, not a God. Let's take a drive.

EXT. countryside, same spot as first scene. Early sunset

Dave: I like you, Mr. Kelley, and I think you're a good teacher, but the stuff you teach...

Matt: spit it out, Dave

Dave: you are standing in a classroom trying to convince a bunch of people that Christianity isn't true and that we're all just a bunch of monkeys and that there is no such thing as morals, and from where I'm standing, anyone who does that is...

Matt: The antichrist.

Dave: Pretty damn bad.

Matt: I'm not the antichrist, Dave.

Dave: I know that.

Matt: somewhere between Gandhi and Satan, there's little ol' me...

Dave: Don't joke, I'm serious.

Matt: I am not your enemy, Dave.

Dave: I know, I know. I'm really... you really screwed me up, you know? Do you have any idea what it's like to have someone that you really respect tell you stuff that wrecks your whole world? Because what you're teaching man, it means that we're just animals, that we don't go to heaven when we die, can you see that? Can you see how that would screw a guy up?

Matt: of course I do. I was exactly like you are now.

Dave: you were a Christian?

Matt: Yeah, my family is all pretty religious. For my last birthday, I asked my dad if I was going to hell when I died. Know what he said? "I don't know, son. I try not to think about it." Talk about screwing people up.

Dave: How come you're not a Christian now?

Matt: Dave, I don't know if you want to hear my answer.

Dave: you can't frigging stop now...

Matt: yeah, yeah... the bottom line of Christianity is faith, right? No matter how much evidence, not matter how proof, the bottom line is faith.

Dave: Right.

Matt: But faith is the bottom line for Islam and Judaism, too. Right? All of the biggest religions in the world require faith as the central tenet. Do you see? And they're all mutually exclusive, you can't be a Christian and a Muslim. No matter how you cut it, 2 out of the 3 religions are wrong. Which 2 is anybody's guess, but there are more wrong people out there than right ones. And they all have faith. You can have all the faith in the world, but that doesn't prevent you from being wrong. And being wrong really matters. The truth is important. Those suicide bombers who flew into the trade towers, they had faith. They had faith in the wrong idea, and that is a heavy price to pay. The one that really got to me was when the hale-bopp comet came through, and that group out in California committed suicide because they thought that the comet was a spaceship coming to transport them to a new dimension. You see? Plenty of people have faith, but what if they're wrong? I decided that faith wasn't the means to discover the truth; faith was a blinder that prevented us from discovering it. Now in Christianity, whenever you get confused, they always tell you, 'it's ok! You don't need to understand; it's all very complicated. Just have a little faith.' But I decided that was unacceptable. I decided I wanted to understand. And the understanding I came to was that when you take away faith, Christianity doesn't have much left to stand up on.

Dave: I wouldn't want to live without faith.

Matt: You're a Methodist, right?

Dave: yeah.

Matt: You know Pastor Granby, right?

Dave: Yeah. You know him?

Matt: Sure. go see him sometime. He'll set you straight.

Dave: OK. What do you believe?

Matt: I believe in abandoning attachments and pursuing truth.

EXT. daytime, Matt and Sandra are walking in the woods.

Matt: look!

Sandra: what is it?

Matt: I don't know. It's a little purple flower of some kind, I don't know what it is.

Sandra: you are natureboy, aren't you?

Matt: I like it. It keeps me balanced. Makes me happy. Helps me think.

Sandra: you think too much anyway.

Matt: spoken like a 4th grade teacher, alright.

They continue walking

Matt: Look, a bee.

Sandra: awfully late in the year. He's pretty sluggish, it doesn't look like he's going to

last much longer.

Matt: look at how hard he fights to stay alive, even though his death is natural and necessary.

Sandra: that's an uncomfortable thought.

Matt: What if he did live?

Sandra: mmm?

Matt: not just him, but what if half of all the bees that usually die in winter somehow survived.

Sandra: oh, here we go.

Matt: So that next year there were one and a half times as many bees reproducing as there usually were. What would happen?

Sandra: more bees?

Matt: lots more bees. And what if only half the bees died that winter?

Sandra: where are you going with this?

Matt: If bees stopped dying, how long before the planet is covered in bees? How many years before there are no more places like this, because the bees have taken over and made it uninhabitable for everyone else?

Sandra: you're not talking about bees anymore.

Matt: no, I'm not.

Sandra: Matt, human beings are different from bees.

Matt: It would be an acknowledged disaster, if bees invaded and occupied all the land in the world. So why is it ok for humans to do it?

Sandra: We are different. We are ...

Matt: special?

Sandra: yes! For lack of a better word, special! We are entitled to prosper, and multiply, and use the world as we see fit.

Matt: Why does everyone think that humankind holds a privileged position in the universe?

Sandra: I don't know, we just do! GOD did it, ok? Are you satisfied?

Matt: Hey, don't be mad at me.

Sandra: I'm not mad at you. I just don't enjoy listening to you talk about this.

Matt: Yeah. You and everyone else. Why is that?

Sandra: because I don't like thinking that the world is as indifferent as you say it is.

Matt: Is the world as I see it that bad?

Sandra: It's a radically different world from the one I'm used to, and it's ...hard to deal with.

Matt: if it's true, wouldn't you want to know?

Sandra: Does it matter? Is it that important?

Matt: Galileo thought it was pretty important to show the world the truth, that the earth went around the sun, instead of the other way around. Lots of people didn't want the truth to get out because people were uncomfortable with the idea of it, because it took away meaning from people's lives. The church condemned it, because it meant that humankind wasn't the purpose of the universe's existence. But looking back, it was a pretty important discovery, wasn't it? It strikes me as valuable to know how the universe works, and if that means we learn that the Earth isn't the center of it, so be it. It seems to me pretty essential that we learn the truth, even if it takes away meaning.

Sandra: The world as you describe it; it seems like... a terrible world.

Matt: No, it's not at all.

Sandra: Look, the way you look at people, how can you believe in love? Do you believe in love? I'm scared to find out that you think we're here together just because your genes have influenced you to think that I'm a virile healthy, offspring producer.

Matt: Look. Look around you. Look at the water. Listen to it. Taste it. It is made up of dead stars. Hydrogen and Oxygen. Incredibly small protons, with even smaller electrons rotating around them. Is it less beautiful, because it's not a mystery, or miraculous? Listen to thunder, watch lightning. Feel the caress of the wind, touch the trunk of a tree, breathe in the fragrance of a flower. These are wonders, these are marvels of the universe! Are they any less marvelous because we know how they came to be? Do they lose their beauty when their origin and nature is discovered? Or do they become more precious, more valuable? Do we begin to see that in a universe that is endless and void, how marvelous it is to be witness to such staggering facets of existence? Do not we, as witnesses, come to feel privileged for the opportunity to observe the wonders of the universe? What we lose in mystery, do we not gain in humility and awe?

To discover that the origin of love comes out of a billion years of evolution doesn't demean love. Love is remarkable, love is a creation that above all other creations in this incredible universe begs us to marvel in amazement! How lucky we are! We have such a world to discover, we have such remarkable phenomena to contemplate, and on top of all this, we have the capacity to love! Knowledge of love's origins doesn't take away our capacity to be grateful for its presence.

I don't know whether I love because my genes dictate me, or if I love because the tiny particles that make up my brain have twitched and surged and given my conscious thought the idea that I'd be happier with someone. But I know this: Just because we know where love came from doesn't mean we need it any less. I'm grateful! Whatever means it was by which love came into the universe, I am grateful for it. How wonderful,

to see the marvels of the universe, and how blessed I am to have someone to share it with!

Sandra: you frighten me.

Matt: Don't be frightened.

Sandra: you don't seem to be fully human.

Matt: No. I am the only one you know who has decided to become fully human.

Matt: I wonder sometimes, if there were aliens watching this planet, and they watched a group of people spend years training, and they spent all their money, and they went to a mountain range, and with great effort and talent and expense they began to climb it, what would the aliens think? Would they be curious as to why we were going to the trouble? Would they be excited to discover what was at the top that was so important to us? I imagine that they're watching their video screens with breathless anticipation as we get nearer the summit, with greater danger and greater commitment, a finer line between life and death. And they would watch with agonizing impatience as we finally ascend to the summit, and plant a flag. They would wait and watch with utmost suspense to see what it was at the summit that we had ventured so much to reach. Was it a buried treasure? Was it secret knowledge? What had we come here for? And they would watch as we turn around, and go back down, and go home. I wonder if they would stare in disbelief at each other, shaking their heads in wonder at the ridiculous nature of humankind. Nothing at the summit! They just did it, for no other reason? Would the aliens regard us as fools, that we would willingly sacrifice everything in order to climb a mountain just to come back down it. Would they consider it a colossal waste of time? Or would they understand? Would it make perfect sense to them? Would they approve?

Would they nod with benevolent compassion when we put a man on the moon, would they smile with understanding when we pursue value by first creating value in a universe that has none? Would they acknowledge that humanity is beginning to understand how to live?

EXT. nighttime, the 5 boys are surrounding a campfire. Tents are set up in the background. It is late fall; the trees are bare and there is perhaps a touch of snow on the ground. There are some beer bottles surrounding the fire.

Andy: Gentlemen. It's damn cold.

Pete: No more of this until spring, man.

Alan: Semester's getting close.

Nathan: man. Time's going by so quick.

Pete: my old man always says that, and I know what he means now.

Dave: We are old men, for crying out loud.

Nathan: I feel like it, you know? I feel like I'm old, like I got a full life behind me.

Andy: you do, man.

Dave: Hey, congratulations, Nate.

Nathan: thanks man.

Pete: what's that?

Alan: Natey boy got accepted to State.

All: congratulations!

Andy: You got into the engineering school?

Nathan: yeah.

Andy: nice work, man.

Nathan: thanks.

Pete: you know, I don't even know what an engineer does?

Nathan: man, I don't have any idea either. I just picked it because, if you can, you should, I guess.

Pete: just as long as you make good money, that's all that matters.

Nathan: I don't know, man. It seems to me like ... I don't know if I picked the right thing.

Alan: What else would you have picked?

Nathan: I don't know, something like you maybe.

Alan: Yeah, Nate the philosophy major.

Pete: man, I don't know what you went and did that for. You're going to graduate from college and you won't be able to get a job.

Alan: I'm not going to college to get a job, man, I'm going to college to get an education.

Pete: spoken like a guy that didn't grow up broke.

Dave: you're all set though now, aren't you Pete?

Pete: Yeah. Four years being an apprentice to Tommy Teller's old man, and then I'm in the money.

Andy: That's a good hookup. I'd like to go union sometime. You make good money.

Alan: I'll be hitting you guys up for loans.

Pete: What can you do with a philosophy degree?

Alan: you can study the world, man. All of the greatest minds ever wrote something down, and you can study what they said and what they meant. You can learn.

Pete: I can respect that, man, but at the end of the day, you gotta pay the bills.

Alan: if worst comes to worst, I'll just hit up the preacher for a place to stay. He's got to help me.

Dave: You and me both are going to be sleeping in Nathan's garage.

Alan: If you could do anything, anything at all, what would it be?

Nathan: I don't know. There's a lot of stuff I'd like to do. What do you want?

Alan: I don't know. But I do know what I don't want.

Nathan: what's that?

Alan: I don't want to turn into my parents. I'm serious. I don't want to just replace my parents, just to be replaced by my kids. I want something more significant than just taking up space; I don't want to wake up in the morning, put in my 16 hours of life and then cross another day off.

Pete: just because you do the same thing every day doesn't mean that your life is insignificant.

Dave: I know what you mean, though. In a way. It seems like adults just go through the motions; they sleepwalk through work and they spend their free time watching tv; it's like they're alive without really living. We're always hearing them complain about how 20 years goes by in a blink, and I think it's because these guys never do anything; its all so routine they never notice it as it passes them by.

Pete: Man, you guys don't know what you're talking about. You're good guys and all, but I think you're spoiled. You don't see how lucky these people are to be able to do things on the weekends, to be able to watch their kids grow up. You guys all know what a jerk my old man is, and I tell you I can't wait -- I can't wait -- to be able to have a kid

and just watch him grow up. And what you guys say is boring, and insignificant? Man, that's a pretty good life. I don't know what kind of expectations you have, but they must be pretty damn high for you to think that your parents don't have a good life. Working a job you don't mind, that's lucky. Working with people you like, that's really lucky.

Coming home to a family that cares about you, spending weekends however you want to spend them, that's a dream come true for 90% of the world. It sure as hell is for me. I don't know what it is you guys want, if that's not enough.

Nathan: I do want that. That's what everybody wants, I think. But I want to make a difference, somehow, I want to figure it all out, and ... a part of me thinks there has to be more, I guess.

Alan: there is more, but what? What's it going to take to make you happy?

Andy: being loaded.

Nathan: that's just it; I don't even know what I'm talking about; is it being rich? Is being... I don't know what making it even means.

Andy: being successful

Alan: yeah, but that's the thing! What does being successful mean? Nathan here is going off to study engineering in college because he wants to be successful, and somewhere along the line he was told that engineering is the path that aspiring successes should go down. Andy wants to have lots of money, because somewhere along the line he was told that being rich is how we define success. We all grow up wanting trendy clothes, and a nice house, and big cars, and money, because we're informed that being successful means having these things. But who is it that's teaching us this stuff? I think it's a bunch of shit. Being successful doesn't mean having these things; being successful

doesn't mean a big screen tv or a bmw, it means something entirely different. We are always hearing about midlife crises, and I'm telling you all a midlife crisis is someone chasing down this definition of success, and getting it, and then realizing – after he's put in 20 years trying to get it – that this definition of success is the wrong one. It's a silly one, and it doesn't make people happy. Society is telling all of us that we have to follow this one path, we need to have a, and b, and c, to be successful. And I say that is complete horseshit. It's not a and b and c that makes a successful life, it's whatever you are passionate about, it's whatever makes you fulfilled. If it's not a and b and c, then dammit, maybe it's d, or e, or f. or fucking z, man. Whatever it is that fulfills you, that's what makes you successful. Not engineering, or business, or wealth. You can be every bit as successful as a baker. Even a poor baker. It doesn't matter if you wear a suit to work, or if you wear sweats. It doesn't matter if you work in a trendy downtown area or if you raise goats. Success is not something that can be dictated to you; it's something you have to find for yourself. And that's what screws people up, man. Nate, you are a midlife crisis waiting to happen, man, it's so obvious.

Nathan: So how do I fucking choose? I don't know. You're telling me that 'success' as the world defines it is wrong, how do I choose the right one? I don't know what it is!

Alan: man, neither do I. I don't think we have to choose. Or if we do, we choose, and choose again, and choose again.

Pete: Why are you so out there? How did you get to where you are?

Alan: The sailboat story; I told you about it

Nathan: yeah, good story.

Dave: tell it.

Alan: I was on Lake Michigan with some family and some family friends. These old guys are friends with my dad and my uncles, and a bunch of them were out sailing, all the old dudes, their in the good life now, you know? And one of them says, “I wonder what all the fucking poor people are doing today.”

ALL: asshole.

Alan: no, he wasn't an asshole. He'd graduated from high school worked for 40 years, you see? He'd wasted 40 years of his life, putting in his time for someday to happen. Working weekends, overtime, trying to get ahead, putting it away for the time when he could retire and enjoy a good life. And he finally gets there, the 40 year sentence is up, and he gets to enjoy the good life, what he's been waiting for. And he's sitting on a sailboat, and he's so happy that he's finally made it – he's earned the right to be there! And he looks around and he says, “I worked so hard for this – I earned it!” And the words come out all wrong, and make him sound like an asshole, but all he was trying to say was how hard that 40 years had been and how much it had cost to get there. And I looked at him, and it was so obvious to me, that there was this huge difference between my generation and his, because it seemed so crystal clear to me that he was wrong. 40 years? Are you kidding me? 40 years or saying, “someday...” 40 years of saying, “not this year, and not the next even, but someday, I'm going to have the good life.” No way. I will never sacrifice 40 years to the pursuit of the good life. The good life is right here and right now, man, and if you're willing to put it off for 40 years then you're just cutting 40 years out of your life and that's way too big a sacrifice. He died of cancer 5 years after he retired.

Andy: for some of us, his life is as good as its going to get, man.

Alan: I don't know.

Int. Principal's office. Mrs. Schenkel is at her desk. A knock at the door.

Mary: come in.

Matt: Hey, Ms. Schenkel, how are you?

Mary: Doing well, Mr. Kelley, and you?

Matt: good, thanks. I was wondering about that field trip.

Mary: Yes. You seem to be something of a teaching oddity; these kids actually want to spend their Saturday with you.

Matt: who can resist?

Mary: if it's a school activity, it needs to be supervised.

Matt: Good. That means you get to come, too.

EXT. Colorado; Dinosaur nat'l monument? Black Canyon nat'l park? Somewhere
dramatic

The class has taken a field trip on Saturday; they are walking through a rough and
dramatic landscape. They reach the edge of a dramatic drop, and sit around, with matt
taking center stage.

Matt: We have an addition today, and she's got poem duty.

Mary: **recites poem**

Matt: What is your goal as a human? To what end do we as a species strive? What is the
purpose of the human race? Are we in agreement on the path we have decided to follow?
Are we even aware that we are pursuing a path? The intelligent life on planet earth –
what is its goal? Does it have one? Does it need one?

Andy: We want to be happy.

Pete: We want to be fed, and clothed, and we want to be warm, and safe.

Mrs. Schenkel: We want peace in our lives, and love.

Student #2: We want to reproduce.

Student #3: We want to prevent death.

Student #4: We want to distract ourselves, so that we don't have to answer this question.

Alan: We want something to believe in. Anything. Doesn't matter.

Dave: We want sustenance.

Nathan: We don't know what we want. We don't have a goal.

Matt: When I was in Pakistan, I spent a few weeks up on a glacier in the Karakoram mountain range. I'd hired some porters to carry food, and I'd bought a goat and a couple of chickens, and we walked for weeks, North and East, into the heart of this incredible mountain range. To get out, we had to cross a high pass that was almost 20,000 feet. It was very steep, icy, and somewhat dangerous. Everybody's sick; we all had giardia. We got up at midnight, and started walking, through the middle of the night, the stars were so beautiful. The moon came out, and you could see...the beauty of this planet, and how insignificant any of man's attempts to conquer her must be. We stood on top of the pass as the sun rose, it glistened off of broad peak and K2 and the Gasherbrums, and we started our descent. The sun melted the ice, and the rocks started to slip loose as we came down. It was still really steep, and rocks were falling down all over the place; some porters slipped, and just barely caught themselves. I was so tired, so sore, I'd been living out of a backpack for almost 2 years, sleeping in fields and tents, and villages, eating

whatever could be eaten, I was so tired, I just wanted to stop. I just wanted to be finished. And I sat down, wondering why it was that I had chosen to live this way. What was it I was pursuing? Why was the purpose of being there, in these mountains that were supremely indifferent to my presence? What had I accomplished?

And I sat there for a long time, thinking about whether it the life I had chosen was a waste of time, or if it was worthy. The thing that stuck in my mind was something I that had occurred to me years earlier, when I was younger. I was in Europe, living out a backpack again. I'd woken up in Venice, really early, and I'd walked down to the Piazza San Marco, and I watched the sun rise. There were so many pigeons in the Piazza, just me, and the cathedral, and the sun, and the water, and these pigeons. And I wondered why I was there, and then I looked at the pigeons, and I wondered why they were there. I started thinking what pigeons wanted out of life. Did they have a goal? Sure they did. They want food, and shelter, and safety, and they want to reproduce. What else? That's it. What happens when they have all those things? Nothing. They still go about the business of getting food, and shelter, and reproducing. They don't have anything beyond that. Even when they have enough food, they still go out and get more, and get fat. They don't have any pursuits beyond the purely instinctive, the purely genetic. How many humans do you know that live like that? How many millions of Americans live like that? That morning in Venice I asked myself what makes humans different from other creatures. And I decided that what made me different, what makes humans different, is that we have a choice in what we pursue. We choose our goals, unlike these pigeons. We want food and shelter and safety, sure, but once we have those, we can, if we so choose, pursue other goals, created ones, conscious ones. We have the capability to decide for

ourselves what to do with our lives. And as I'm sitting there in Pakistan, on my own, matted beard, scraggly hair, haven't taken off my clothes in a month, been sleeping on the ground, eating dhal and rice, lonely, banged up, carrying everything I owned on my back, overwhelmed, I started to feel good again. I started to laugh! Because I'd done something only humans could do. I'd done something very few humans have been willing to do. I'd created my own goals. I had deliberately made a decision to challenge myself, to discover a life worth living instead of just accepting the life that was handed to me. I was on the side of that mountain, struggling for every inch, for one reason. I had chosen to be there. How rare it is, to be at a place you want to be! To be the person you want to be! To lead the life of your own choosing, how precious! Will you? Will we? Will the human race? Where do we as a species, want to be, what society do we wish to live in, what goals do we want to pursue? What is our place in the world? Humankind does not inherit value. We must create it.

EXT. The field trip is stopping for lunch; Alan and Nathan are sitting down next to Matt

Alan: What's your bracelet say?

Matt: Om Mani Padmi Hum.

Alan: what's that mean?

Matt: it doesn't translate all that well. It means the jewel in the heart of the lotus. It's a meditative mantra used by Buddhists.

Alan: are you Buddhist?

Matt: I don't know. What's a Buddhist?

Nathan: Beats me.

Matt: Buddha was a teacher. He was an outstanding teacher, and I accept his teachings and try to follow them.

Alan: then you're a Buddhist.

Matt: I accept the teachings of a guy named Jesus, and I try to follow them also. Does that make me Christian?

Nathan: what is Buddhism?

Matt: it's not a religion. It's a philosophy. Buddhists don't go out and worship Buddha, or pray to him, or ask for miracles from him. They just try to live a certain way, the way Buddha taught. They're convinced he found the right way.

Nathan: You're Buddhist.

Matt: No. I try to live as Lao-Tzu instructed, but I'm not a Daoist. I try to live as the Bhagavad Ghita instructs, but I'm not Hindu. I try to live as Jesus instructs, but I'm not a Christian. I try to live as Buddha instructed, but I'm not Buddhist. I try to live as the Sufis lived, but I'm not Muslim. Now, there's something very important in what I just said, but it's hidden. Did you catch it?

Alan: You just said that all the major religions teach the same things.

Matt: (whispers) the right way to live.

EXT. Matt gets up to leave

Alan: hey! Stick around!

Matt: what?

Alan: I'm not done listening yet.

Matt: What do you want to know?

Alan: All of it. I want to leach your brain, you know that?

Matt: Yeah, I know. You have to watch yourself right now, though. You are this close to becoming a follower.

Alan: your follower?

Matt: it's not that big a step for you to start believing whatever I say, because you've decided to believe in me. See how that could create problems?

Alan: I'm not going to believe anything you tell me.

Matt: Good. I am an amazing guy, but even I end up being wrong once in a while, and if you accept everything I teach as true, you're going to get led astray. The most important thing you can learn is how to think for yourself. Everything else in life is dependent on that.

Alan: how did you get to where you are now?

Matt: You want the map so you can follow it?

Alan: Yes. That's exactly what I want.

Matt: I was so much like you when I was your age. I was exactly like you.

Alan: Then help me out, man.

Matt: there is no formula that gets you where you want to be. Don't follow my path, create your own.

Alan: But I don't know where to begin. There's so much out there, and there's no rhyme or reason, and there's no guidance anywhere, and there's all these obstacles. I want to experience the world, I want to call the planet my home, I want to be able to sift the wheat from the chaff, I want to trust myself so much that I don't have to rely on society for guidance, and it's just a little overwhelming. How do I start?

Matt: Don't you see? You already have.

Ext. Nighttime. Dave is approaching a small house in the country. An older man,

PASTOR CHAD GRANBY, out walking his dog.

Dave: Thanks for seeing me, pastor.

Pastor: c'mon in.

Int. family room of pastor chad's house; the two are having hot drinks

Pastor: Mr. Kelley mentioned to me some concerns you were having.

Dave: Is he a friend of yours?

Pastor: Mr. Kelley is a very unusual man. I disagree with him a lot, but I agree with him on a lot of things, too. You don't have to agree with him, David, but you don't have to be afraid of him, either. He's a good human being, and yes, he is my friend.

Dave: You think he's going to go to heaven?

Pastor: yes, I do.

Dave: why?

Pastor: because I want to believe it.

Dave: but he's not Christian. He's... anti-christian.

Pastor: God as I know him is not going to be upset with someone who's trying to discover the truth about the universe. Whether the person is wrong or right, if they're really committed to understanding the universe, I don't think God would condemn that.

Dave: He's trying to teach us that there's no such thing as heaven and hell. That

Christianity's not true, and we don't have souls. Did you know that?

Pastor: Is he telling you what to think, or is he asking you why you think what you do?

Dave: what difference does that make?

Pastor: well, teaching you to accept things as true, that's what I do. Teaching you to question things, that's his job.

Dave: He's influencing the class so that people are wondering whether or not Christianity is true.

Pastor: I know.

Dave: You're ok with that?

Pastor: Yes, I am. The questions he's asking are relevant questions. They're important; they're questions that I've struggled with and that he has too.

Dave: but he's doing it in school. He could be fired for that.

Pastor: He should be fired for that. I'm convinced he will be fired for that. If it was up to me, I'd fire him.

Dave: Then he's wrong.

Pastor: Now, we're getting to the heart of it. Everything we've said up till now has just been preparation for this. Ask me what you came here to ask me.

Dave: Should I listen to him?

Pastor: Listen to him? Listening to him won't send you to hell. You can listen to him all you want. It's good for you, because if you're serious, you're going to come across these doubts and questions sooner or later. Should you be forced to listen to him? Well, that's illegal. that's why they'll fire him; that's why they need to. Should you choose to listen to him? I do. The question, the biggie, is whether or not you should agree with him.

Nobody can help you with that one.

Dave: you really think they'll fire him?

Pastor: I'm sure of it.

Dave: have you told him?

Pastor: Told him? He's known it from the very beginning. It's his intention to get fired.

Bit surprising, isn't it? Like I said, he's a rather unusual man.

Ext. Matt is practicing Kung Fu. Very intense

INT. classroom; matt is teaching

Matt: I met a man, once, in the middle of a forest. He was all alone. I asked him if he was lonely, and he told me that he never got lonely. "I have my pet Unicorn for company," he said. I laughed at him. And he said, "don't you believe that I have a pet Unicorn?"

-No.

-But it's true.

-show me.

-it's right in front of you.

-I can't see it.

-it's invisible.

-I can't feel it either.

-it doesn't have mass.

-Can we weigh it?

-no. it's incorporeal.

-It needs sustenance, doesn't it? Can I watch it eat?

-It doesn't need sustenance, it is immortal.

Every test that I came up with, he was able to avoid. I became frustrated, and gave up.

"you believe my Unicorn doesn't exist?" he asked me.

“I believe the Unicorn exists only in your imagination, but not in reality.” I told him.

“Ah,” he said, “then tell me, why do you believe you have a soul?”

it weighs nothing

it has no color, no shape

it is not made up of matter

its presence cannot be detected

Do you have a soul? Are you immortal? Does death merely change your life? Or does it

End it?

Scene:

Music track; no other sound. Scenes switch back and forth between:

Scene: Nathan and his family are having dinner. He starts talking, and the shocked and very serious expressions on his parents’ faces make it apparent that he is talking about what Mr. Kelley taught.

Scene: Matt is practicing Kung Fu, very wild-eyed and intense, slowly moving faster and faster.

Int. Principal’s office. Mrs. Schenkel is seated. Matt enters.

Mary: I’ve spoken to the school board. They are going to have your classroom supervised, and if you breach any more standards of acceptable teaching behavior they’re prepared to convene an emergency session to determine whether or not you’re to be let go.

Matt: Let’s not waste time. Convene the board meeting now.

Mary: Did you accept this position intending to get fired?

Matt: Yes.

Mary: you betrayed my trust.

Matt: losing your trust, and even your friendship, maybe – is a high price to pay. But I have to do this. Regardless of consequence.

Mary: Why?

Matt: Because nobody else will. We are entering a time that we're not prepared for. Our ability to influence the world is outstripping our willingness to understand it. The questions I'm asking shouldn't be condemned; they should be encouraged. We desperately need some kind of public forum where we can discuss what the role of humankind is in the universe. But there isn't one, because no one has been willing to challenge convention. We're reluctant to pursue truth, because the truth reveals flaws in what we hold sacred. It reveals mistakes in the rules that we thought we were supposed to live by; it creates a vacuum where once there was a code of how to live. I don't teach against religion, Mary, I just teach the truth, and how to pursue it. And when you teach truth, falsehoods get exposed. Even cherished, sacred falsehoods. Now, our government, and the schoolboard, may tell us that what I'm doing is illegal, but pursuing truth? Understanding the reality of the universe, eliminating falsehoods? That's what a teacher does, Mary.

Mary: Matt, you may be proven right someday. The world may become the place you think it needs to be. I think, maybe, that you might even be right. I hope you're not. If the truth takes away what it means to be human, that I think I'd rather have a delusion.

Matt: bu—

Mary: But none of that matters. What you're doing is illegal. You can't give religion in public schools, and you can't take it away either. That's the bottom line, and I just wonder if you realize what you're throwing away.

Matt: I'm not the career type, Mary –

Mary: You're a teacher, Matt! It's who you are; everybody around you knows that! What are you going to do when you can't teach?

Matt: Mary! You think you need a classroom? And desks? and homework, and grades? Haven't you been paying attention? You don't need any of those things! My life is dedicated to learning everything I can, and that means that up to the day I die I will be a student. And I am committed to sharing everything I learn – and that means that up to the day I die I will be a teacher. Not because it's my job, but because I'm human. We learn, and we share. Every single member of the human race is forever a student, and forever a teacher. I don't need classrooms. I'll just make my own.

Mary: I am angry, with you, Matt. And deeply hurt. And more than a little confused. Go.

Ext. the 5 boys are gathered together outside. It is winter.

Alan: so they're going to fire him?

Nathan: they're going to have a board meeting, he defends himself and gets a chance to explain.

Andy: if he promises to follow the rules, will they let him stay?

Dave: He doesn't want to follow the rules. He thinks the rules need to be changed. That's why he's doing this.

Alan: So he's going to be fired.

Nathan: I don't know. It's up to the board.

Alan: how is what he's teaching illegal?

Dave: separation of church and state; you can't teach that Christianity is false in a public school.

Alan: He's never said anything about Christianity.

Nathan: He's telling us we don't have souls; it's the same thing.

Alan: What he's saying makes sense, doesn't it? Doesn't it force you guys to rethink anything? Do you still think you have a soul?

Dave: Yeah, I do.

Alan: How –

Dave: No, there's no how. I just do, ok?

Alan: do you want him to be fired?

Dave: Yes.

Alan: How can you –

Dave: he wants to go around saying this stuff, fine – but I shouldn't be forced to listen to him.

Alan: man, people like you put Galileo under house arrest for saying that the earth wasn't the center of the universe. He's just telling the truth, but it scares you too much to deal with it so you try to pretend it doesn't exist –

Dave: so what if I do – maybe I'm wrong, even if I'm wrong, isn't it still better to live my way?

Alan: no, man, think about what the world would be like if everyone was forced to accept that the sun and the stars went around the earth. Think about how much we wouldn't understand, think about the things we wouldn't have...

Dave: think about all the things we would! You take away what we believe in, you take away everything! I don't know how you live, man, I don't know how you get through your days –

Nathan: hey, c'mon, guys...

Dave: do you know what I'm talking about?

Nathan: yeah, I know what you're talking about!

Alan: Do you think you have a soul, Nate?

Nathan: AAAAGH! Let's talk about something else for a while.

Ext. screened in porch at Matt's house. Sandra and Matt are having a confrontation

Sandra: You bet your ass I'm mad at you! You screwed up; you went too far! And I'm scared to death to think that you might have done this on purpose! It's bad enough that you're up on your ideological throne with your head in the clouds, but I think that you might have done this intentionally, which would explain a whole lot, and would really force home the fact that after we've been together for how long, I've been sharing myself with you like I've never done with anyone, you've never told me the truth! You've kept your intentions hidden from me the whole fucking time! Do you realize how much of a piece of shit that makes me feel like? Do you have any idea how much of an unnecessary appendage it makes me feel like?

Matt: What would you have done, if I had told you? Would you have accepted it, and supported me?

Sandra: we'll never know, will we?

Matt: oh, don't give me that. You would have told me I was wrong.

Sandra: Oh, how silly that would have been! Matt Kelley wrong! You're not ever wrong, are you!

Matt: About this? No! I'm not! And you know it!

Sandra: God you're arrogant! Tell me, what is the reason that half the town is up in arms against you?

Matt: Look, the truth frightens people!

Sandra: So do wackos!

Matt: Wacko. That's fresh. "He's different from us. But his ideas are very persuasive! That makes him dangerous; better get rid of him."

Sandra: Maybe you're wrong.

Matt: Maybe I'm right, and they don't like it. Socrates wasn't wrong, and they killed him anyway. Galileo was put under house arrest because he tried to show that Earth was not the center of creation. Darwin was vilified because he discovered that humankind was not central to creation. Even Jesus! He tried to change people's convictions, he tried to show them that the way they were living was fundamentally incorrect – and the very people he was trying to inform were so frightened by the implications that they murdered him! If you want to improve the world, you have to change it, and that means butting heads with all the people who are afraid of change.

Sandra: Socrates, Jesus, Galileo, Darwin, and Matt Kelley. Pretty good company you put yourself in. You're the next Jesus, eh?

Matt: Oh, of course not. I don't delude myself into thinking I'm a great man. And I'm certainly not the first to have stumbled upon this truth. But I have stumbled upon one. A profound truth. A truth that is every bit as relevant as the truths I've mentioned.

Sandra: what truth is this?

Matt: the truth that mankind does not hold a privileged position in the universe –

Sandra: the truth that mankind has no relevance! Do you see why that truth will not, cannot, be accepted? Do you see that this truth is simply intolerable? You are trying to convince people that their lives have no meaning or purpose! You are trying to convince them that there is no answer to the question of how to live! You are trying to convince them that there are no principles which can guide us, that there are no rules set down by God on how to live; that there is no goal worth pursuing! That nothing matters! That there is no sacred!

Matt: no, that we must choose! We must decide for ourselves what is sacred!

Sandra: You've gotten so caught up in what's true you've lost sight of what's relevant!

Matt, you are extraordinarily bright. You dwell in this realm of ideas that few people are able to even visit. But you never leave. You get so wrapped up in ideas that you fail to recognize that you live in a world inhabited by human beings. We are not ideas. We are not abstractions. Letting a million people starve to death because thinning the herd is beneficial – that's an option in your world of ideas, but it is not an option in the human world. You are about to be written off because you cannot distinguish between the two.

Matt: ...wait, don't go. Dammit!

Ext. Sandra has left the house; she stops on the porch and waits for Matt. He comes out and approaches her.

Matt: You want to know the worst thing I've ever seen?

Sandra: what?

Matt: I was coming back from Tibet to Nepal, on the Friendship Highway. There were 5 of us; a girl from Japan, a guy from Korea, a guy Sweden, and a Belgian. And we were talking about the worst thing we'd ever seen. One of the guys had seen an old lady who'd died of starvation laying across a doorway, and people just ignoring it. One guy had seen a dead baby floating in a gutter in India. It was some grim stuff. But I won.

Sandra: what did you see?

Matt: In Cambodia, at the temples of Angkor Wat, there's an old lady, an old nun. And she sits in front of a statue, and you give her a little change, and she lights an incense stick for you and says a prayer. So I give her a little change, and she smiles, and she lights the incense stick. And it was all terribly difficult for her to accomplish, she really struggled with these simple tasks, because her hands and feet had been chopped off by the Khmer Rouge.

Sandra: oh, God.

Matt: We have no enemies but ourselves. This world is so close to being perfect. It is a diamond, and we have let ourselves become the flaw.

Sandra: God.

Matt: So I asked myself, "how could people do these things? How could people be so evil?" And I couldn't find an answer. What's the worst thing you've ever seen?

Sandra: What?

Matt: What's the worst thing you've ever witnessed, in your whole life?

Sandra: Pictures of the World Trade Towers being destroyed.

Matt: Do you remember the Buddhist statues in Afghanistan that were destroyed by the Taliban, the oldest, biggest, Buddhist statues in the world?

Sandra: yes.

Matt: After they destroyed them, they wrote on one of the pedestals, "We believe that good always overcomes evil." Do you see?

Sandra: what?

Matt: they thought we were the evil ones. they thought they were in the right. They thought we were wrong. That nun in Cambodia had her hands and feet cut off because her persecutor believed in the wrong things. The trade towers were destroyed because some religious extremists believed in the wrong things. A person who is mistaken is far more dangerous than a person who is merely cruel. We have become our own enemy, not because some people are evil, but because some people are incorrect. Being wrong about how to live carries a great price.

Sandra: What if you're wrong?

Matt: Then I'm wrong. Let's get everyone together and discuss it, and find out. What if I'm right?

Matt: I am sorry I didn't tell you earlier. I need you around for this.

Sandra: Do you? I don't think you do, and it makes me feel pretty lousy.

Matt: I do. I'm not Mr. Spock, for chrissakes.

Sandra: you act like it sometimes. You take a lot away from being human, Matt.

Matt: I'm trying to find out what it means to be human.

Sandra: shut up. Just be with me and pretend the world makes perfect sense for an hour or two, will you?

Int. the Schenkel house. Nathan is in his bedroom. A knock on the door, and his mom enters.

Mary: hey.

Nathan: hey.

Mary: how are you doing?

Nathan: All right. Kind of screwed up, actually.

Mary: Oh, you poor kid. You shouldn't have to deal with all this.

Nathan: you don't think so?

Mary: what do you mean?

Nathan: I think that maybe its important to deal with this. I think its necessary, for me to come to terms with it all.

Mary: I swear you are an adult trapped in a teenager's body sometimes. You're a very mature young man.

Nathan: then you think I need to deal with it too?

Mary: I think it's a real tragedy that you kids are exposed to all this, but I think that maybe it's a necessary tragedy. The world is an awfully complicated place, and it's getting more so every day, and you guys have to learn it sooner or later. I just don't like it all that much.

Nathan: I feel like I should know what I'm going to do with the rest of my life. But I don't have a clue as to what I should do with my life. I don't know what I should go after, you know? I don't know what is important, and I don't have a clue what should be important.

Mary: You don't have to answer these questions tonight, you know. You don't even have to get them answered this year. It might take you 40 years to get the answers to these questions, and that's ok too. Just take it day by day.

Nathan: That's good to hear.

Mary: I love you, kid.

Nathan: love you too, mom. Hey, mom?

Mary: yes?

Nathan: I was thinking about ... going to see Mr. Kelley...before the board meeting.

Mary: That's your decision to make.

Nathan: Is he a good or bad person?

Mary: Oh, Nate. I've asked myself that question so many times. I...what do you think?

Nate: He says some things that I don't like. And I want to think that this makes him a lousy person. But I think that maybe, that's just the easy way out. Maybe the lousy things he's saying are true, and it's not his fault at all. It's just that the world is a lousy place.

Mary: The world's not a lousy place, honey. And he's not a lousy person, either. Don't ask me how that works.

Nathan: Good night.

Mary: Good Night.

Ext. Pastor Granby's front porch; he and Matt are having hot drinks.

Pastor: So what will you do after the trial?

Matt: oh, I thought I'd hang around till I'm 35 and then run for president.

Pastor: Typical. I'm not too worried.

Matt: you think I'm right, don't you?

Pastor: oh, I think you're right about a lot of things. I think you're wrong about a few, though. I think that the fundamental issue that we disagree over is not souls, or Christianity, or God. I think our disagreement stems from what we think the best life is. You think that the best life is one that has cast off the shackles of faith, and I think that the best life – the only tolerable life, in fact – is one that embraces faith, shackles though it may be.

Matt: Faith hides truth.

Pastor: As it should. The best life is one that is based on fulfillment. If the truth takes away meaning, and faith provides it, then the fulfilling life is one that ignores truth whenever it has the potential to infringe upon the comfort of knowing our place in the world. People don't choose religion because it's true. They choose religion because it's necessary. It gives us meaning in a world too complex to ferret it out on our own. I'm a Christian because I prefer it to the alternative. It provides me with a great deal of comfort, and if it ends up being untrue, I don't want to know. You're trying to show a light switch to a room full of people that want to believe in the radiance of heaven.

Matt: I know what you're saying, but ignoring the truth has serious consequences. The African tribe⁵ rubbed their bodies with sacred oil that was sanctified by a holy man; it was promised to deflect bullets. Any guesses as to how that worked? Europe dominated the world. North and South America, Africa, Asia, Australia, were all conquered by Europe. Why? China. Egypt. The Incas. The Cherokee. India. The Maori. Why did they lose so dramatically? Because Europe studied the universe, and discovered truths about how it worked. They learned what was true and they discarded what was not.

⁵ what tribe?

There are laws that govern the universe, and understanding them brings great benefits. Knowledge of how gravity works lets us use lets us build bridges that don't fall, knowledge of how light works lets us use electricity. Knowledge of chemistry gives us medicine. Knowledge of how the universe works is what gives us the automobile, and the internet, and surgery, and electrical outlets. And when Europe set out to explore the world several centuries ago, knowledge of how the universe works is what gave them cannons, and gunpowder, and huge ships, and navigational tools, and sharper steel, than anybody else. Do you see? Knowledge is power. If your country was at war, would you pray for a good old heavenly smiting, or would you look into this concoction they call gunpowder? You can ignore the truth all you want, but when the Nazis are closing in on an atomic bomb, you ignore the truth at your own peril. Do you see? Those who don't seek knowledge are the ones who lose. Those who are content without understanding the universe are condemned to be history's footnotes. Do you see? In this world, you either pursue the truth even in the face of faith – or you are replaced by a society that does.

Pastor: You can pursue truth without denying faith.

Matt: And when they conflict? When it's either one or the other? Which do you turn to?

This is the point we're at today: Faith gives us one path to follow, and truth gives us another. They're mutually incompatible.

Pastor: you can have both.

Matt: no, you can't. Either you have a soul or you don't. There's not another option.

Either we're the central purpose of the universe, or we're an accidental consequence of it.

Pastor: Why do you want to know the answer so badly? Why is this so important to you?

Matt: Because it's important! Man, if there is such a thing as heaven, then nothing else matters besides getting there. What's 80, 90 years compared to millions and millions and billions? This life doesn't mean beans compared to infinity, so the only sensible thing is to use our life to chase down heaven. I will do whatever it takes to get there. I will stand hip deep in shit for the rest of my life to make it to heaven, because that's all that matters. If there's a heaven, then time doesn't matter. Who cares if you don't learn to play beautiful music in this life? You've got infinity to get it together. It doesn't matter if things get put off in life if you've got another life to get it down. Heaven gives you all the time you want to learn all the things you want, to do all the things you'd like to do. Heaven means you're not going to run out of time.

But man, if there isn't a heaven, if this life is all we have, if 80 years is the maximum amount we've got to spend in this universe before our existence comes to an end and we dissipate into the star dust from which we came, then we can't be wasting time! We've got to get it all done in just a blink! Think about it; you have 100 years to do everything you want to do! You want to write a novel, start writing! Tonight! You want to sail the Nile, you better do it! This week, if you can! You wait until the time is right it will be too late! There is so much to do in this universe, you could spend a million years and not get your fill. How many people do you know that put their nose to the grindstone for 40 years; nothing but weekends off to sit in front of the tv, thinking that they're going to have the good life when they come out on the end of it? They're too old to enjoy their opportunities when their time finally comes.

Pastor: boy do I feel like a turd.

Matt: You know I'm right! We all hear that 'youth is wasted on the young' but that's bullshit. The truth is, free time is wasted on the old! 65 is too late to lead the life you always wanted to lead, 65 is too late to try to become the person you always wanted to be, 65 is too damn late to find the fulfillment you have dreamed of but never searched for! We cannot afford to waste time. It is too precious. We are edging closer to our end every day; we can't afford to waste one of them. Because we don't have an endless supply. When we die, that's it. We don't start over again, we don't get more chances, we don't get a heaven where all the missed opportunities come by for a second round. Do you realize what the greatest gift in the universe is? The most precious, marvelous, wondrous, awe-inspiring gift in the whole universe is? Being alive. You don't believe me? Ask Napoleon. Alexander the Great. Caesar. They are incredibly jealous of you. Think about that. Because even with all they had, the world at their fingertips, it was stolen from them by time. You have the one thing that they don't. You are still alive. Just as all generations before you, your life will end. It will be over. But not yet! There's still time! What a chance, what a chance! Take advantage. If there is a heaven then do whatever it takes to get there, because nothing else in this life is important. But if there is not a heaven, then time is your enemy. Don't sleepwalk through your weeks and your years, because you can't get them back. Whenever you find yourself killing time, know that time is killing you.

Pastor: so that's what you're doing? You're training these kids?

Matt: It's ethics. How to live. We don't teach it. We don't discuss it. We aren't allowed to question it. It's no surprise we don't understand it.

Pastor: that's where you and I disagree. It's no accident we don't discuss it or question it. We don't want to. We don't want questions about how to live. We want answers. We want to be told how to live. We'll take any answers, we'll take ridiculous answers. As long as we don't have questions. To tell somebody that there are no rules on how to live is to give them a freedom they desperately want to avoid. They'll worship the sun, or the moon, or crystals, or stars, or mountains, or gurus, whatever. They'll take any answer about how to live, because an incorrect answer is preferable to an accurate question. You may be right, and our value system may be in need of reevaluation and repair. But an old, outdated, antiquated, mistaken value system is preferable to the absence of one. I choose relevance, whether or not truth be on its side. So does everyone else. That's why you're condemned to failure. But don't feel so bad. You won't be the first one.

Ext. Shot of Matt practicing with Chinese classical weapons. Shot jumps back and forth between him practicing and visions in his mind's eye of his travels. various shots of the Asian world, with Matt interacting. Shot of mountain climbing. Shot of staying in a yurt with Tibetans. Shot of resting in Pakistan with a porter. Shot of the rain in Nepal with a family. Shot of sharing a joint with a yogi in India. Shot of Buddhist monks in Thailand. Shot of a city in China. Shot of a Hindu temple in Kathmandu. Alternating with shots of

Nathan studying from what is obviously Matt's booklist.

Ext. Nathan is walking alone in the woods; he goes to Matt's house

Matt answers the door.

Matt: Let's go.

They go outside to a beautiful spot in the mountains. A steep cliff.

[Come to the edge.]

Matt: Now.

Nathan: I don't know whether to believe in you or not. Everything rides on it, and I don't know which way to go.

Matt: Believe in me?

Nathan: yes, believe in you! If you're right, then you represent something that the world needs

Matt: and if I'm wrong?

Nathan: If you're wrong, I don't know what that makes you. But I'm screwed. I don't know what to think, Mr. Kelley. I need something, I need to believe in something.

Matt: I will tell you something. I will clear it all up right now. That's why you're here, right? We will resolve this once and for all. You want to know if I am right in how I view the world? I don't know. I think I'm right, or I wouldn't be doing this. I'm absolutely convinced I'm correct, but I've been wrong before. Have you ever made a mistake? Me too. Is this one of them? I don't think so. But nobody ever does. I am 100% convinced that the things I'm trying to convey are correct, but I have been wrong before, I will be again and I could be now. So should you listen to me? Yes. Should you accept what I'm saying? No. Certainly not. Listen to what I'm saying, and then agree with me or disagree with me. Don't believe in me. I'm human and that means that sooner or later I'm going to disappoint you by being wrong. I'm not trying to teach you what to think. I'm trying to teach you how to think, but I expect you to come to your own conclusions. Your whole life, you are going to be told what to believe. By commercials, by politicians, by newspapers, by neighbors, you are going to be subject to all kinds of

beliefs that you are need to evaluate. You need to learn how to distinguish the true from the false. Does your laundry really get cleaner with megafun bleach or is that just baloney? Is this political candidate really a disgusting sleazeball or is that just what his enemies are telling you? Does this corporation really make the world a worse place, or is that just what the liberals are telling you? Is this corporation really kind and just and good, or is that just what their pr representatives are telling you?

You are struggling because you want something to believe in. We all do. It is so much easier to go through life believing in something, because then we don't have to think for ourselves about how to live. It's easier to obey rules than it is to create them. Creating rules is a frightening concept; it pulls the rug right out from under us. Believing in something is the easy way out; accepting without questioning is so much more convenient. But the trouble is, it makes you a sucker. When you believe without questioning, you get manipulated. Plenty of lousy wars have been fought because the soldiers believed in their governments without questioning them; plenty of tragic crimes have been committed because people believed their leaders without questioning them. People lose their lives, because they want something to believe in so badly that they are willing to believe in the wrong thing. You, Nathan Schenkel, want something to believe in, because that will make you feel as though your life has an answer to it, and whenever you have a question, you can shrug it off and say, well, I don't know the answer, but that's ok, because somebody else does and it all makes sense somewhere. Christianity provides you with meaning and a place and a direction, and when you struggle with the paradox of free will vs. omnipotent Deity, or the paradox of ultimate justice vs. ultimate mercy, you shrug it off and don't need to know the answers. We humans prefer to let

someone else do our thinking for us. These are tough questions, and answering them exposes us to thoughts we don't care for. So we try to avoid answering them. Now, I don't care if you're a Christian, or a Muslim, or a Satanist, or a Communist, or an environmentalist, but you had better be doing your thinking for yourself, instead of letting someone else do your thinking for you. You believe in something, you let them deal with the tough questions while you have an easy time of living in a world that makes sense, but the thing you believe in will end up being wrong sooner or later and if you don't see it coming, you are going to be wrong in the way you live. Every tragedy in the history of the world was committed by people who had willingly let somebody else do their thinking for them, because deciding for themselves how to live was too frightening and too painful. Would you commit suicide? People who believed in Jim Jones did. Would you cut a man's throat while making his children watch and cheer, just because he stole a banana? People who believed in Pol Pot did. Would you try to exterminate a race of human because they were different? People who believed in Hitler did, people who believed in Mussolini did, people who believe in David Duke did, people who believe in Osama bin Laden still do. If your leaders told you good loyal patriots hated jews, would you? People did, in the south. If the Church told you good Christians tortured nonbelievers, would you? People did, in the Inquisition. If the head of state told you it was necessary to invade a country, would you believe him? People did, in Vietnam. If Authority tells you how to live, do you believe it? Or would you get all the evidence and find out for yourself? Believing in things such as the Church or the State or a charismatic leader is a sure-fire way of being misled at some point in time. there is only one thing that you can afford to believe in. Yourself. Agree with me, or disagree with me. Believe in

yourself. Agree with the President, or disagree with him. But don't believe in him.

Agree with Pastor Granby, or disagree with him. But don't believe in him. Because the only thing that separates Gandhi from Hitler is your ability to distinguish between what is true and what is false. You want me to put you on the right path, and I'm telling you that there isn't one. Any path that is placed before you is one that enables you to believe in something that removes the obligation of thinking for yourself, and that is the one thing that you must do in order to discover a life worth leading. Should you accept what I teach? Decide for yourself. Should you endorse this government position? Decide for yourself. Should you accept Christianity? Decide for yourself. Should you believe the billion and one different methods companies use to get you to purchase their products? Decide for yourself. Should you blindly accept the way of life that 21st century America says is the path, the right path, the way to success and fulfillment? NO. Decide for yourself. You have only one tool to guide through this incredibly complicated life. You. And that is all you need.

[And he pushed. And they flew.]

Various shots of board meeting arrangements. The school, the crowded audience, the students, the teachers, the board.

Int. a classroom; Matt is getting ready. Sandra is with him.

Sandra: How are you?

Matt: (thinks about it for a while, then smiles.) I'm good.

Sandra: Are you frightened?

Matt: A part of me is. Nobody likes being fired, but more than that, nobody likes being hated. But another part of me knows that there's nothing to be frightened of. Nobody in

the world can take away my ability to be the person I want to be, so in that sense, how can I be hurt?

Sandra: Where is this going to leave us? I've lost you, haven't I?

Matt: How would you prefer to lose me? Would you rather lose me like this, or in a car wreck after we're newlyweds? Or to a heart attack when I'm 40? Or to cancer when I'm 60? Or in my sleep at 85? Everything you've ever cared about is going to be lost at some point. Your parents, your children, your looks, your house, your life. Don't resent loss. Be grateful for the moments that we've been given.

Sandra: Will you ever think about me?

Matt: everyday for the rest of my life.

Sandra: you can stay, you know. Or I could go with you.

Matt: The worst thing we could do would be to lead lives not of our own choosing.

Sandra: I love you.

Matt: I love you too.

Sandra: Will you feel my loss as I will feel yours?

Matt: No. You grieve because you see our parting as a great loss, while I rejoice because I see our being together as a great gift. At the end of it all, are you grateful for what you received? Then nothing else matters.

Int. the board meeting. The room is abuzz when Matt enters. It silences immediately when he enters. He walks to his seat, and sits.

Int. the crowd and the board members are heatedly asking him questions.

Man #1: Mr. Kelley, are you a Christian?

Matt: no sir, I am not.

Man #2: Mr. Kelley, are you anti-Christian?

Matt: I'm not exactly sure what that means, sir.

Man #2: are you an enemy of Christianity?

Matt: No sir, I try not to be anyone's enemy.

Man #1: There is written testimony from students that you are trying to teach decidedly non-Christian values and principles; is this true?

Matt: I have been doing my best to teach students to question values and principles, to recognize their origins and evaluate their validity, but other than widely accepted scientific truths I have not tried to tell them what to believe.

Man #2 You told them they didn't have souls, Mr. Kelley.

Matt: No sir, I asked them to provide me with reasons why they thought they had souls, and I presented them with scientific evidence that indicated they didn't. I then left it up to them to decide.

Man #2 why didn't you give them scientific evidence that indicated the existence of souls?

Matt: there isn't any.

Man #What do you mean --

Man #1 you are aware that it is illegal to discuss religion in a public school?

Matt: it is also both legal and necessary to teach students important truths about the nature of the universe, for reasons social, economic, practical, and ethical. That is the whole purpose of formal education, is it not?

Man #1 Mr. Kelley, what is to be taught is a matter for the government and the public to decide.

Matt: I wholeheartedly agree, sir. And with all due respect, the reason this meeting has been called is because neither the public nor the government has been doing its job. I have been forced into the position of teaching that which is illegal because neither the government nor the public has recognized the necessity of addressing the complex issues that are being ushered in at the beginning of the 21st century. We desperately need a public dialogue, sir, but our government forbids us to do so.

Man #3: A public dialogue about whether or not Christianity is true?

Matt: no sir. Folks, I have no interest in teaching religion; that's not what I'm trying to do. What I'm teaching is truth, and the only reason it flows over into the realm of religion is that some of the truths we as a society need to be aware of force us to rethink religion.

Man #4: Mr. Kelley, what truths are you referring to exactly?

Matt: If you accept evolution as true, that has profound implications with regard to religion.

Man #2 Evolution is a theory, Mr. Kelley, not a fact.

Matt: Mr. Goodwin, I know that you grew wheat for 15 years before you moved out here. In those 15 years, did you ever use the same herbicides 3 years in a row?

Man #2 No.

Matt: why not?

Silence

...because the same bugs that you were trying to kill developed resistance over time.

Right?

Man #2 yes.

Matt: Developing resistance is just another way of saying they evolve, Mr. Goodwin. You use updated pesticides every year because evolution is the way the world works. Now, if you really think that's only a theory, then try something. Put your money where your mouth is, and use the same pesticides for 10 years in a row. You can't do that; that would be foolish, you'd lose your farm. Because evolution happens. That's the way the world works.

Man #4 I don't have a problem with what you've said up to now, Mr. Kelley, but why do you have to bring religion into it?

Matt: How did the Nazis come to power?

Man#2: Oh come on-

Matt: please, let me try to answer this. How could such a doctrine like Nazism come into existence, and how could so many people accept it? One of the purposes of knowledge – education – is to answer questions like these, so that we might avoid such calamities in the future. In order to answer these questions, it is imperative that we understand the truth about what it means to be human. We need to understand how the mind works, we need to understand why humans act the way they do. And this means knowing the truth about human origins, and knowing the truth about the origin of human emotions and tendencies. Hatred and fear and jealousy, loyalty, revenge, resentment motivated much of the rise of Nazism – where did those emotions come from? We've been raised to believe that these emotional flaws were simply installed there by a God who decided that he wasn't going to make us perfect. If evolution is true, that's not why we have fear and hatred at all. We have emotions like fear and hatred because they evolved, along with opposable thumbs and upright posture. Resentment and suspicion of

people that are different from you is the basis of racism, it's the basis of sexism, it's the basis of nationalism, it's the basis of genocide and it's the basis of xenophobia. Many of our emotions are evolutionary adaptations that seem to have outlived their usefulness. We must understand the origins of how we think and what we feel if we are going to live together in harmony and peace. We must study the truth about being human in order to understand how we need to live.

Man #3: Mr. Kelley, lots of students are uncomfortable with what you're teaching. Some of them are very opposed. But no one – not a single one – said you were a bad teacher. I don't think you a bad teacher. I think you're a good one. But I will not permit you to coerce these children into abandoning religion.

Matt: I don't flunk them for believing they have a soul. I just ask them to have a reason for believing it.

Man #2 if you teach people that they are animals, they will act like animals.

Matt: How? Raping and pillaging and murdering innocents? Is that what you think?

No, you're wrong. I met every single one of you before I was hired, and every single one of you liked me. You liked me. Did you think I acted like an animal when you hired me?

Were you afraid for the children, or for your wives? I'm no barbarian. I get more joy and fulfillment out of 10 minutes than all of you combined got out of last week! Because I know that this life is all I have, these seconds I'm spending -- it's all I've got! I don't have another chance when I'm dead to enjoy the good stuff; I can't afford to just pass the time until Heaven. This is my ONE SHOT to live! We are all running out of time; don't let it slip past. Teaching people that they evolved is not going to make them barbaric or heathen; its going to make them appreciative and determined to live in a fulfilling way!

Man #3 Correct me if I'm wrong, Mr. Kelley, but you are trying to destroy the values that our society lives by, aren't you?

Matt: No! Don't you see? These values have already been destroyed! Long before you ever heard my name, the rules your generation accepted as true were crumbling. The old code says Greed is a sin, and it wasn't me that made told everyone to admire Bill Gates as the world's most successful professional! The old code says lust is a sin, and it wasn't me to give the ok to expose everyone to it 24 hours a day by every marketing avenue available! The code says laziness is a sin, I wasn't the one that invented such time saving devices as auto-dialing and remote controls! The code says violence is a sin, and it wasn't me that made Schwarzenegger more famous than Gandhi! The code says pomp and glamour should be replace with piety and humility, and I wasn't the one who put Princess Di on the cover of magazines instead of Mother Theresa. The code says gluttony is a sin, and remind me, who was it that told us spending money on shopping was our patriotic duty? Not me. I'm not trying to destroy values. They're already destroyed. And the kids of today know it. They're bright kids, and when they look around they can see that we're teaching them rules we don't believe in; we're teaching them a code we don't live by. They know they're being duped. We've been lying to ourselves so convincingly we believe it, but they know better. And big surprise – they resent it. I'm trying to get the message out that we desperately need to make some new values.

The code the west was raised on has collapsed. Just as the medieval code collapsed as the beginnings of modern science taught us new truths about the universe, we have come to a point where our old values are no longer relevant. Fundamentalists argue that

society is in peril because we have drifted from the code we inherited, but the truth shows us that the opposite is true - society is in peril because the code we inherited has drifted from the realities of the modern world. The very livelihood of the west is dependent upon the pursuit of the very vices that the old code condemns, and while some would argue that society needs to be changed to fit the code, the reality is we need to change the code to adapt to society.

We need create a new code. We desperately need new rules on how to live. We are unfocused and confused as a society, because the code of how to lead the best life is no longer applicable but nothing new has been able to take its place.

I want to build new rules; this is what the world needs. But I am prevented by the accusation of blasphemy; the questioning of the old rules. Throughout history this accusation has slowed the development of a code of how to live, and yet though slowed, the development of this code has never stopped. The rules you say I want to tear down have already been destroyed, yet nothing can be built in their place because society is unwilling to accept the life of questioning. As a result, we live in a vacuum. The old rules of how to live are dead, and we don't have new ones. We live in a crisis of value. And if you think I'm being dramatic, look around you. Crystal worship. Astrology. Religious extremism. Xenophobia. Nationalism. Middle class teenagers robbing convenience stores out of boredom and frustration. Dissatisfaction with where we are, and a confusion about what goals to pursue. All around us are the examples of a society that is desperate to discover how to live. Answer this question, quick: What is the purpose of America? What is the purpose of humankind?

Man #4 it sounds to me like you just dug your own grave, Mr. Kelley. What you just said is a compelling argument to get back to the old code; you've just about convinced me that the world is a mess because we've drifted from the right way to live. We need to work to make sure the old code is once again valid.

Matt: lots of people agree with you. But how will the old code deal with the issues we're going to face in the 21st century? You can believe that humans are made in God's image all you want, and that human life is sacred and can't be manipulated because it goes against the ethics God handed down, but the ability to manipulate genes isn't going to go away. We are far away from coming to a consensus on what it means to be human, and we don't realize that the clock is ticking. Teenagers in today's world are going to have the option of choosing their kids genes; enhancing this trait, reducing that one. Are they prepared to answer the question of what is acceptable? The old code isn't able to deal with this. How long before we have the ability to read a hard drive just by plugging ourselves in? 100 years? 30? These kids I'm teaching are going to be around for it, and they won't get any guidance from the old code. The world is becoming more and more differentiated between the haves and the have-nots – the haves are gaining more and more and more, and it won't be long before the haves will have the option of becoming genetically more intelligent, more athletic, longer living, healthier, and more secure. Are there then 2 classes of human? If the haves are genetically superior to the have-nots, are they better suited to rule? What is the basis for democracy and equality if citizens are no longer equal? The old code has no answer to this question. What happens when people no longer die? When life spans can be extended indefinitely through modern technology? Should we choose to end our lives voluntarily; do we pass laws to enforce

it? Do we ship them off to different solar systems? Is our planet a resource to be exploited by humankind, or is it something of value independent of its economic utility? What about other planets? If we discover valuable natural resources on a moon of Saturn, and we have the technology to exploit these resources profitably, do we do it? What about the oil in Antarctica? If we accept evolution, we need to rethink our stands on abortion, on premarital sex, on patriotism, on environmentalism, on hatred, and fear, and love. These are all ethical questions, questions of how to live. They are answered according to whether or not we believe human beings are the purpose of the universe, or a consequence of it. These are questions that the 18 year olds of today are going to have to answer. Are they prepared for it? No. But they need to be.

When Galileo observed that the earth went around the sun, it was proof positive that the earth was not the center of the universe. For the first time, modern man had direct evidence of a truth that conflicted with faith. It was a testament to the fact that the universe was not created for humans; we're not central to the universe' purpose. And nobody was prepared to accept that. Galileo was arrested by the church and made to swear that he had been wrong. We couldn't handle the truth. It conflicted with faith, so we ignored it and pretended it didn't exist. But the same pursuit of truth that brought us knowledge of a heliocentric universe is what brings us what brings us the world we live in today. We accept the amenities that the advantages that the truth gives us, but we reject the implications. We love our cars and our computers, and our laser surgery, and our Viagra, but we refuse to acknowledge that the discoveries about the universe which make these advances possible reaffirm our place in the universe – The human race isn't merely unimportant, the human race is an accident.

Because we've gotten into this position, this either/or scenario where we must choose between a world of truth and a world of faith, there's a backlash. We've slowly accepted thinking one way and acting another. There's a word for that; it's called hypocrisy. And open your eyes and you will see a world of resentment towards this hypocrisy.

People resent the world of science, because it reduces the comfort of purpose and meaning. Just ask anyone in the crowd. Think of the attitude you have towards me because of my position. The *Christians⁶ let their child die rather than let it enter the hospital, because modern medicine wasn't capable of altering God's will. People – kids, your own kids – resent the world of faith, because they discover it's not true. Columbine, 1999. Do you believe in God? Yes. Bang. People resent the fact that they are being prevented from making an impact by the powers that be – Seattle WTO meeting, 1999. But the biggest danger doesn't come from those who resent science, or those who resent faith. It comes from those who resent being left behind. Society is moving in a direction it has not chosen, towards a goal it does not understand, at dramatically different speeds. Those who are at the leading edge of society are pushing further ahead without guidance, and they don't recognize the enormous gap between them and those in the very back. But let me tell you, those who are getting left behind are very confused, and very frightened, and very angry, and very dangerous. They resent being left behind; and because we don't know the right way to live, we have slipped into a role of trying to prevent them from catching up. It's easier, far cheaper, and much more comfortable to keep them behind, so we continue to keep them under our thumbs, because we don't see that easier, cheaper, and more comfortable is taking us in a direction we should not be

⁶ Who is it that won't accept medical attention? Christian Scientists?

going. And of course there's a backlash. We prevent them from being allowed to catch up, so they have decided to replace us by destroying us. If you can't beat them, join them, but if you are not allowed to join them, then destroy them. Sept 11, 1999. The history of revolution is the history of inequality, and we are on the edge of the greatest inequality gap in the history of the world. Why does it surprise you that America is the world's #1 enemy?

We as a society face a crisis of how to live. A crisis of purpose. And without an answer, we are adrift, making the wrong choices, pursuing a path with frightening consequences. We are prevented from seeking a coherent, satisfying answer because doing so would acknowledge a truth that we are reluctant to accept – the truth that human beings are not central to the purpose of the universe. The right way to live is not defined for us; we don't inherit value. We must create value, we must choose for ourselves how to live. We must decide as a civilization what purpose we are to pursue, what path we are to take.

Man #4: Do any of the students have anything to say.

Dave: Yessir. I'm a Christian. And even after everything I've heard, I'm still a Christian. I don't ever see myself being anything other than Christian. I just wanted to say that I think listening to Mr. Kelley wasn't bad for me or anything. I think it was good for me, because it made me think about things.

Matt: Why are you a Christian, Dave?

Dave: Because I think a world with faith is a better world than one without it.

Alan: Mr. Kelley. I think you're a great teacher. I think you were really good for all of us. In me, at least, you started something that really needed to be started. I wanted to say in front of everyone that I'm grateful. Thanks.

Matt: What have you learned?

Alan: The fact that there is something rather than nothing is all the evidence I need that the universe is a sacred place, and I am radiant..

Matt: Nathan.

Nathan: Yes.

Matt: What are you going to do with your life?

Nathan: I think maybe I'll be a teacher.

Monologue

There is a universe. Long ago in this universe, the fundamental particles of which the universe was made cooled down, and collapsed due to gravity into stars. These stars lived for many billions of years, and then they died. Their particles were used by other stars, and then still others. Sometimes gravity pulled the particles of dead stars together, and these collapsed to form planets. These planets had much activity on their surface and beneath, for many millions of years. And at some point, the complex chemicals formed from this ancient starstuff began to reproduce, and there became life. Life reproduced for many millions of years, competing against one another for resources. And at some point, not so long ago, this ancient starstuff that lived and reproduced came to be self-aware. This timeless stardust, formed and reformed and reformed a million times over, became conscious. We are recycled stars. There are billions of galaxies in the universe, and billions of stars in each galaxy. How many planets there are is not known. How much

life there is also unknown, and how much intelligent life there may be is unguessed at. But there is one planet we are sure of. In a world based upon inconceivable principles of space and time, one thing seems to be certain. On one particular nondescript planet, in one particularly empty spot between two spiral arms of one particular nondescript galaxy, there is life. And it is intelligent. It is us. Let us marvel at the universe. Let us explore, with wonder and with awe, the sublime creation from whence we originate. In that briefest of moments which we refer to as a lifetime, let us grasp our chance to contemplate the beauty and the mystery of existence. Let us question and prove, and discover what we can about the universe, that we may understand it, and understand ourselves. Let us seek out the origin and the nature of all things, that we may uncover the nature of the universe, and the role of mankind in it. In a life where each breath is inconceivably unique and precious, let us not waste our chance. Let us live deliberately. If we do know inherit purpose, then let us choose to create it. Let us choose to lead lives of wonder, and die grateful, that we had such a chance to live.

Come to the edge.

It's too high.

Come to the edge.

I might fall.

Come to the edge!

I will push you

You will FLY