**HZT4U/IDC4O Blog thread example:**

**NAME:**

*Please read the following blog thread and answer the following three questions in pairs:*

1. Offer your own personal interpretation of the song “Courage” by The Tragically Hip.

2. Pretend you are ‘on-line’ reading this blog. Write a post responding to the overall topic.

3. In your own words, what is the role and importance of courage and risk taking in life?

**From:** Johan K. Wallace D’alessk   
**Sent:** January 16, 2013 10:53 AM  
**To:** Stephen Cholan; Christopher Beaker; Danik Lefloor   
**Subject:** contest

free coffee for you if you can identify why... my mind was just blown by this line from Hugh MacLennan's novel, *The Watch that Ends the Night*: "But that night as I drove back to Montreal I at least discovered this: that there's no simple explanation for anything important any of us do, and that the human tragedy, or the human irony, consists in the necessity of living with the consequences of actions performed under the pressure of compulsions so obscure we do not and cannot understand them."

**From:** Stephen Cholan   
**Sent:** Wednesday, January 16, 2013 11:16 AM  
**Subject:** RE: contest

the depth of the statement centers around the ideas of compulsions and explanations. our actions are motivated by a desire to satisfy our needs and/or wants; we act selfishly or selflessly...to varying degrees. (this includes behaviour motivated by moral / religious ideology)  
these motives enter the realm of "obscure compulsions" depending on how self-aware we are ... or are not.  
  
that said, I think the tragedy, or irony, is living with the unintended consequences of our actions, despite our best intents.  
  
I'll take a jar of Maxwell House original blend!

On a technicality, Cholan gets a coffee. Sometimes you can give a wrong answer and but a 4++ answer nonetheless... In this case, his interpretation is most impressive. To clarify, knowing what you know about me, what is it about this passage that would make me in particular feel a connection?

Let's bring Jorge in, I think he might get it...

There is a line in the Tragically Hip song "Courage" that I have listened to 5 million times since 1993: "So there's no simple explanation, for anything important any of us do, and yeah the human tragedy consists in the necessity of living with the consequences under pressure, under pressure. Courage, my word, it didn't come, it doesn't matter, Courage, it couldn't come at a worse time.  
  
So, this begs the question, how many other songs have I listened to that have literary references that I was oblivious to. It's kind of like the other night when I watched "Dirty Hairy" for the first time and there was a line that I thought was from the movie "The Naked Gun"

**From:** Danik Lafloor  
**Sent:** Thursday, January 17, 2013 9:27 AM  
**Subject:** Re: contest

The passage blew Dalessk’s mind because he's a closet existentialist who believes that our freedom to make choices is absurd.  Keep pushing that boulder up the hill, Sisyphus - and don't forget my coffee.  (Cholan's answer is off topic.  He is awarded no points and let God have mercy on his soul.)

Danik Camus

**From:** Christopher Beaker  
**Sent:** January 17, 2013 1:03 PM  
**Subject:** RE: contest

The absurd is both a state of fact and the lucid awareness which certain people acquire of this state of fact. The “absurd” man is the man who does not hesitate to draw the inevitable conclusions from a fundamental absurdity.

Primary absurdity manifests a cleavage, the cleavage between man’s aspirations to unity and the insurmountable dualism of mind and nature, between man’s drive toward the eternal and the *finite* character of his existence, between the “concern” which constitutes his very essence and the vanity of his efforts. Chance, death, the irreducible pluralism of life and of truth, the unintelligibility of the real—all these are extremes of the absurd. (Sartre)

I believe the "concern" referred to above is your desire/compulsion to quantify your oblivious moments - a vanity of effort condemned by it's absurdity.  While your ignorance may, in fact, be real, it's unintelligibility truly beggars [your] imagination.  Like Sisyphus on the slope, hairy and naked, we are defined by our obscure compulsions and rendered insignificant in a Universe that truly cares naught for the likes of us.

**From:** Kathleen Macklack  
**Sent:** January 18, 2013 6:35 AM  
**Subject:** RE: contest

Good morning gentlemen,

Cholan and I chatted yesterday morning, and he forwarded Dalessk’s email about Hugh McLenna's quote since he felt it was linked to our earlier conversation.  It gave me much to think about, and I have been pondering the statement ever since.  I would like to join your dialogue/conversation with the following reflection.

As a disciple of "process theology", an obscure branch of philosophy that marries 20th century scientific understanding (especially about quantum mechanics) with a religious understanding that there is a God who both creates and guides us, McLennan is right is stating that the explanation of life is not "simple".  His claim that "actions are performed under the pressure of compulsions so obscure we do not and cannot understand them" is one I agree with.  Process thought argues that all action, be it the behaviour of a subatomic particle or a complex self-aware creature like a human being, is always partially framed by its past.  Past events from many sources and at many times can continue to influence the entity within its present moment.  The agent of the action is always, at the same time, also able to act with some measure of freedom.  Perhaps this is "the irony" or the "tragedy" of which he speaks - the dual nature and paradox of being free, yet "stuck in" or defined partially by the past, is what governs the entire fabric of space-time and all that is contained within it.  Making this all easily understood as to why we are the way we are is therefore impossible because we cannot ever divide out and identify all of those individual yet combined strands of every moment of our lives.

My point is this - my present has been shaped by my past and will continue to be influenced in this manner forever, in ways I cannot know unless the source is somehow revealed.  My interpretation of McLennan is that he postulates that this is some big, unexplainable mystery.  I disagree.  Although we will never know all of the reasons for the factors in our lives that shape us, there ARE explanations if we seek them, or if others share with us where those factors that shape our lives are sourced.  For me, this is the wonder of the journey of life.  I do not see life as a burden or a tragedy, where we have to live with things seemingly beyond our control, and just cope with them.  I firmly believe we always have freedom to choose how we deal with the circumstances we cannot control and we can learn from the experience.  We can seek, and sometimes (not always) find sources of explanation for why things are as they are.  This is the core of both scientific AND religious pursuit, although religion is more open to the idea that a degree of mystery is acceptable since mystery = God's presence.

Anyway, thinking about this stuff gave me something to do other than marking tests on the transformation of sinusoidal functions.  So thanks for letting me play.

Kathy

**From:** Stephen Cholan  
**Sent:** January 17, 2013 7:35 AM  
**Subject:** FW: contest

this passage came to mind over our discussion this morning...thought you might enjoy it!

OK...Beacker obviously wants the coffee more than I do...

Since Beaker pulled Sartre out of his hat and Lafloor wanted to sound all intellectual referencing some dummy pushing a rock up a hill, I thought I'd throw in a quote from someone REALLY famous...  
  
in response to Kathy implying that our past defines / restricts / influences who we are now, I have this to say:  
"it is not who I am underneath, but what I do that defines me."   BATMAN!!!

Monday, January 21, 2013 1:12 PM

No...I'm talking you serving us fresh-ground, percolated coffee with all the amenities, and you in attendance wearing a white server's jacket!!

Choices...influences from our past... duality of ourselves (both inner and outer selves)... this "thread" is starting to get mighty tangled, and can therefore be compared to the complex tapestry of life we "weave" for ourselves by the choices we make!  
  
for the record, it was Dumbledore who said that it was not our abilities but our choices that define us, not The Batman. However, to follow Beacker's lead, I would present to you that Batman is very aware of the impact his past has had upon him, but it was his *choice* to either live his life as a victim or become a vigilante. We cannot change our past, but we can determine how much we want our past to define or control who we are today.  
  
With respect to our duality, I would argue that this is again governed by our ability to choose, and that our duality is in reality only an outward presentation of what is really an inward unity of self. Bruce Wayne is Batman, and Batman is Bruce Wayne. They are one and the same, and he chooses which "self" he wishes to present to the public.  
  
I think D'alessk owes us all coffees!

Aaah... The Batman.  Philosopher King, Scourge of the Underworld and Jokers (such as ourselves?).  Does he suggest that our past does not define us, responsible as we are for each and every choice? Given his own past and the direction it leads him, he would seem (willingly) blind to the reality of his own remembrance of things past (I know the title's changed, but I'm old and Proust is Proust).  Ironic, or a clever contradiction designed by the Batman team to precisely fuel conversations such as this one?  Life's a beach and figuring it out even harder, especially given our own immersion within the self (the view gets really myopic!).  Wait... does the Batman even have a past or is he self-created?  Is he Bruce Wayne or something other?  Good gracious...does this beg the question of duality?  Is it, in fact, our past that creates this duality insofar as we are unable to reconcile our shaping with what our intellect/conscience/soul recognizes as right?  Aaah... The Batman lurks inside us all as we are Gotham. (Great metaphor those writers created, no?)

And as I stated earlier, and you have just given evidence to support, life is one really complex tapestry that has been "threaded" together; I guess what you are saying is that it is only God who can see the whole picture!  
  
ps. you might have said it first, but I said it with *pizazz*!!

Cholan (and company),

"We cannot change our past, but we can determine how much we want our past to define or control who we are today."

I already said this long ago in MY 2 cents worth (or maybe that was 1 cent worth) - copy cat!  Whether it be Batman, or ourselves, we are always partially a product of our past but are free to choose how we let this past influence us.  God has a "subjective aim" for each of us and we are gently guided towards this Divine goal, if we allow ourselves to be open to and influenced by this guidance.  God has the entire road map of all possibilities of given events and can see all the roads and their various branches, knowing where they all ultimately lead.  We always have the choice of path, and no matter what road we take, God will be there during our journey, offering to be our moral compass if we allow ourselves to be guided.

Don't know if Batman is open to Divine influence, but he certainly is a product of his past, and makes the choice NOT to remain in victim mode.  He makes his own future.  It's a bit like chicken/egg - how much does past influence future or future depend on past?  They are continuous AND are intertwined, just like the physicists tell us in the double slit experiment.  In a nutshell, a photon (light particle) on one side of the universe seems to "know" what another particle on the other side of the universe is doing.  How are they connected?  Are photons conscious?  
How can they "know" what the other particle is going to do before it even does it?  These are questions the scientists are struggling with and have been struggling with for a while, since quantum theory showed up....

Got to go do some work now...D'Alessk owes us all coffee, I agree.  I drink mine BLACK!!!!

Monday, January 21, 2013 7:48 PM

for a science teacher who does only "cut and dry, bare bones statements", associating a someone's personality with a mythical animal spirit seems to be pretty hypocritical (at the very least, subjective and unprovable). However, I expect nothing less from the same "science teacher" who, one post earlier, brought God into what was a great discussion. (it never fails; when someone has nothing else of merit to say, they feel compelled to play the God Card!!)  
  
Lafloor, it is obvious that you have been trying to ride on the depth and merit of your initial post, but you of all people should have heeded Firechief Beatty's words: "Who are a little wise, the best fools be"  !  
  
  
SNAP!!

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Mon 7:13 PM

Monday, January 21, 2013 8:40 PM

This "hypocritical science teacher" will take her theistic views permanently out of your email discussion from this point on.  Thanks for letting me play for a while!  I'm going back to my Bible reading and rosary beads now....along with my test tubes and chemicals.

Kathy

Tuesday, January 22, 2013 7:10 AM

Let the trash talking begin!

I guess Steve's right - I should contribute to our conversation.  Kathy's quote suggests we can control the influence of our past in the presence.  For some, that's a possibility; for others, the past, especially if it is marked by some traumatic event, is beyond their control.

Here's a new conversation:  whether or not we can control our past, we can certainly shape it into a narrative that gives us a sense of identity.  This narrative can, in turn, offer proof of a set of beliefs we have chosen for ourselves - or feel the necessity to cling to.  The religious person will interpret a fortunate event as proof of God's existence or His master plan.  The fiercely individualistic businessman, as proof that his or her hard work and determination has tipped the balance in his or her favour.  Shaping these narratives may give us the illusion of control yet the possibility of the loss of control if certain events in our lives - those that conflict with our narratives - force us to realize that the stories we have created for ourselves are actually self-delusions.  In these cases, we may sink our heads into the sand and cling to our narratives even more desperately or return to our past and re-shape it once more.  If this is the case, are people who seem to have control over their past truly in control or are they stubborn and even blind as they treat their narratives as some objective consideration of past events?

I'm late!  D'Alessk, you better have my coffee.

Danik

Sent from my iPhone

What if our past is the catalyst for personal entropy and death = a state in which memory has not only deteriorated (inevitably) but achieved a state of “inert uniformity” consisting of its own obliteration and thus a return to its original state of intrinsic divinity?

From: Bob Kirknspock

OK, so I would like to throw my musical mind into this discussion, if you will allow.

Danik, though I appreciated your narrative of narratives regarding the shaping of our future, may I raise a thought? If a religious person thanks God for their good fortunes, have they not given up their control of the future, and has forfeit their control of their past as well? Equally, the individualistic business man of course will assume credit for his good fortune, but what happens when things do not go his way? Often blame of the other results, suggesting acknowledgement that they are no in complete control of their future. As the great 20th century philosopher has said,

"What we can or cannot do, what we consider possible or impossible, is rarely a function of our true capability. It is more likely a function of our beliefs about who we are."

So the question becomes, who or what shapes our belief in who we are, for there lies the truth in who we will become.

OK... so what you are basically saying is that the very notion of truth itself is subjective... Truth for the Christian is very different than truth for the Muslim... and then therefore reality is subjective...

I think we have just entered Plato's realm, ie the Myth of the Cave... or for the younger generation, The Matrix!!

***Because a black hole has only a few internal parameters, most of the information about the matter that went into forming the black hole is lost.*** (Our past)  ***It does not matter if it is formed from television sets or chairs, in the end the black hole only remembers the total mass, charge, and angular momentum. (***Our present)***As long as black holes were thought to persist forever this information loss is not that problematic, as the information can be thought of as existing inside the black hole, inaccessible from the outside.***(Our solitude) ***However, black holes slowly evaporate by emitting Hawking radiation.***(Our interaction with others)***This radiation does not appear to carry any detailed information about the stuff that formed the black hole (***the meaninglessness of existence/the banality inherent in interaction***), meaning that this information appears to be gone forever***(As with memory –  self-imagined, truth, or something in between)***.***

'nuff said

Danik, let me start by addressing something you said:  "Kathy's quote suggests we can control the influence of our past in the **presence**."  I added the bold and underline.  I am sure that Danik meant (being the good English teacher that he was and everything) we can control the influence of our past in the present, but if you capitalize the word he actually used, I like it better.  We can control the influence of our past in The Presence, meaning with God's assistance or guiding energy.  I also liked your idea that "we may sink our heads into the sand and cling to our narratives even more desperately or return to our past and re-shape it once more" when life deals us a curve ball.  That last bit is much more to my own liking and personal philosophy.  The past spirals around and around into our present and future, and we have the choice to bury our heads or use the teachings of that event to reshape our new selves and our relationships with others.

Bob, you blew me out of the water today!!!!!  Your statement:  "Who or what shapes our belief in who we are, for there lies the truth in who we will become" was very profound.  I think our belief is shaped by all that touches our lives.  No person exists in a vacuum.  We are influenced by people and by nature itself.  We are not bodies with a soul added as an afterthought; we are, instead, embodied souls.  The enire universe is about relationship.  Proton to electron, planet to star, star to galaxy, human to human, etc, etc.  Those relationships make up all the physical world and we cannot detach from that, although the mystics or black hole travelers might argue differently (Yes, Chris Beaker- I will get to you soon!)  We are shaped by the past because it is made up, in part, by our memory of our contact with the physical world around us.  Any time we conjure up a memory, we are time travelers.  Even the act of writing this email depends on my past learning of language and grammar and all that other stuff you guys teach, but I am free to continue this discourse in a new way.

Now, Chris, your whole black hole thing...There are some physicists who will say that what gets sucked into the black hole (light, matter, etc) isn't "lost" as you suggest.  It goes to a parallel universe.  There are some scientist types who will have us believe that there are infinite universes all connected together with black holes that act as conduits into that other place.  I don't believe that anything ever gets "lost" as you say (even the socks that have no match from the dryer).  The stuff I teach the grade 10/11 kids about **the law of Conservation of Mass and Energy suggests that all matter and energy is neither created nor destroyed - it just converts to a different form.**  Events from our past become encoded into our synpases with biochemical markers and somehow we get an internal filing system of memories out of that.  The whole universe is basically made up of patterns of information.  All subatomic particles, according to "string theory' are one-dimensional loops of "string" which vibrate in certain patterns.  Bob, as a music teacher, you know about patterns that sound waves make for different instruments or voices.  Everything is unique because it has a different pattern.  Protons vibrate their "string" differently than neutrons or electrons.  Human beings are also just patterns of encoded DNA in a double helix, along with our treasure trove of biochemical memories that are analogous to the pattern on a memory stick we use to encode computer information.  We are somewhat free to use the information we store in new or novel ways, but we are also going to be partially defined by what's stored there and how the info makes us feel.

OK, gentlemen, also, can we PLEASE stop referring to God with masculine pronouns?  I understand you are products of your past where you had no other models of language to refer to the Divine, but can you show me that you are free to act in a different way in the future?  And besides, it's ticking me off!!!!!

I will buy coffee for everyone this Friday if you like.  This is fun!

All I can say is "Huzzah!" to both Beaker and Kat for taking us to a completely new level (or are we in fact on the other side of the black hole in a parallel universe?)  
  
this discussion has taken many twists and turns, but it always seems to come back to the influence of our past  on our present, and how we are shaped by our past (either passively or actively). Let me throw a couple of new considerations into the melee: first, I do not think we have yet given any thought to the role that "Will" plays in our life. By that, I mean that two people (siblings, even) could experience very similar lives (and therefore have very similar pasts) and yet be very different people in the present and future. Both siblings come from abusive parents; one becomes an abuser, the other a social worker. Earlier, the argument was presented that this was a result of choice (which is true), but our willpower certainly factors in. Choice is easy sometimes; it's the follow-through that is difficult.  
  
My second consideration originates from **Northrop Frye**. Frye stated that "**the good life**” is one inspired by love and guided by knowledge." We have been so focused on "how we live" that we haven't really thought about why we live. As this discussion demonstrates, we certainly all seem to possess enough knowledge to get us through the day, but Frye feels that knowledge without love (or vice versa) is incomplete.   
  
I'll leave it to Bob to provide some lyrics to support this, and I'll end with a science-related quote (just to show that I can keep up!)  
  
"What truly is logic? Who decides reason? My quest has taken me to the physical, the metaphysical, the delusional, and back. I have made the most important discovery of my career - the most important discovery of my life. It is only in the mysterious equations of love that any logic or reasons can be found."   
  
Excerpt from John Nash's acceptance speech when he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize (at least, it was part of his speech in the movie "A beautiful Mind").   
  
P.S. you know you're in a parallel universe when I start talking about Love!!

In keeping with Kat’s comment on how we as humans are dependent on loving relationships, here is a musical chorus from a nameless musician that coincides with Cholan's point that knowledge (and wealth for that matter), and though important in day to day life, is incomplete without love.

That is why the human heart searches and needs love to survive, and why so dangerously, is the reason why poor souls who feel there is no love left, feel no reason to live. This stresses the importance of faith when human love (real or imagined) is no longer visible or felt. Without the true faith that God is love, the human hearts may have no other place to turn, and will feel like THERE IN ONE BIG BLACK HOLE!

Step to the beat of my heart,  
I don't need a whole lot,  
But for you I admit I,  
I'd rather give you the world,  
Or we can share mine,  
I know I won't be the first one,  
giving you all this attention,  
Baby listen,  
I just need somebody to love,  
I don't need too much, just somebody to love,  
Somebody to love.  
I don't need nothing else,  
I promise girl I swear,  
I just need somebody to love.  
I need somebody, I need somebody,  
I need somebody, I need somebody

Riddle me this, how many of you remember your drive into work (in your case Cholan, a bike ride). How many of you come into work and ask yourself "how did I get here?" I know it has happened to me and do you think that through repetition and monotonous repetition leads to a sharp mind when old age sets in or do you think it hinders our working memory. Therefore I dare to ask, do you think people who are blind dream in sight or are their using their other senses?

Dalessk: You realize that the posts in this thread now have nothing to do with the original post?

Cholan: actually, if you consider the "obscure compulsions that drive us" as well as our levels of self-awareness, they most certainly do!!  
try to keep up!

Two corrections to my last post: it was **Bertrand Russell**, not Northrop Frye, who stated that the good life was inspired by love and guided by knowledge, and John Nash only won the Nobel prize for economics (as opposed to the Nobel Peace prize). Points to Beacker for pointing these errors out in conversation)  
  
now, onto Beaker's post:  
  
if I understand it correctly, we begin in a state of divinity, and then are born into the world and subjected to sin. It is only through death and *the obliteration of our memories*, that we can return to a state of divinity.  
  
if this is so, then...what's it all about?! life, I mean...  
  
How are we to believe in a higher power that asks us to learn to be loving towards one another, and then demands that we die and forget all that we learned?  
  
As this higher power must necessarily exist outside of the space/time continuum, I present to you that divinity is necessary for such existence. Perhaps life is a proving ground and it is here that our "worth" is determined. Those deemed worthy are then allowed to ascend to the divine, and granted the gift of forgetting our time here...memories which  will come to represent a single grain of sand in the "beach" of our divine existence.  
  
I'm pretty sure someone here could return to the notion of comparing "ascending to the divine" with traveling to parallel dimensions, and someone else might want to comment on the idea of reincarnation (but it won't be me, 'cause that's blasphemy!)

Paradox: in recovering our lost divinity (and presumably achieving omniscience) doesn't complete memory return?

Existing outside of the space/time continuum creates a reality as separate from this one as it is possible to contemplate.  Perhaps the human condition/reality is a testing ground for each "atom" (for want of a better term) of our divine self.  To what purpose, though, given the omniscient nature of the contemplated divinity?  Consider: by purposely sabotaging memory, the divine being is able to temporarily obliterate the conscious self in a finite, time-based, control that "frees" Herself from the burden of omniscience and thus allows Her to "play".  The reunification process, while adding nothing to Her understanding (omniscience, again), has offered the opportunity to forget, if only for a time.  This is in keeping with the idea that within all of creation there resides a spark of the divine and offers eloquent testimony in terms of why a divine being would care to create something as mundane as this world of ours.