

# **THE WAY OF PERFECTION**



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Richard Schulze

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## DEDICATION

The Way of Perfection is dedicated to the late Victor Baranco. He described himself as a black, Jewish used-refrigerator salesman from the streets of Oakland. He was also a wonderful teacher who taught perfection to me and many others. I write this book with deep respect and acknowledgment of his role.

Richard Schulze



Table of Contents  
**THE WAY OF PERFECTION**

<b>Part I. The View from Perfection.....</b>	<b>1</b>
1. Perfection, the Word.....	2
2. The Purpose of Creation.....	3
3. Perfection and the Three Levels of Illusion.....	6
a. Creation as Illusion.....	6
b. Identity as Illusion.....	7
c. Fear as Illusion.....	10
4. The Way Illusions Work.....	13
5. The Perfection behind it All.....	14
 <b>Part II, The View from the Garden.....</b>	 <b>17</b>
Step 1. Prologue: The context of the story.....	20
Step 2. Into the Garden; what are things like there?.....	21
Step 3. Nature of Adam and Eve. Who were these folks?.....	22
Step 4. God’s admonition. How humans were singled out to possess free will.....	23
Step 5. The plot thickens.....	25
Step 6. The eating of the fruit.....	26
Step 7. The effects of the fruit.....	27
Step 8. God’s reaction.....	29
Step 9. God describes how things are going to be.....	30
Step 10. We are sent out of the Garden. ....	32
Summary: the moralistic interpretation – original sin...	34
Summary: The perfection view.....	35



## Table of Contents (continued)

Choosing.....	37
The view from the Garden – Conclusion .....	38
<b>Part III, The View from Here.....</b>	<b>40</b>
1. Defining good-and-evil consciousness.....	42
2. Why it is that good and evil are treated as equal.....	43
3. Value judgments and truth.....	44
4. Preference vs. value judgment.....	44
5. Justifying value judgments.....	46
6. The boomerang effect of value judgments.....	47
7. The antidote to value judgments – forgiveness.....	47
8. The perfection of value judgments.....	49
<b>Conclusion: Finding Perfection.....</b>	<b>50</b>



## Introduction

The Way of Perfection is a way of looking at the world by looking at its perfection. This is not to deny the ongoing interplay of sensation and judgment that clamor for our attention. The perfection of which we speak underlies them; they and all of creation arise out of it.

The Way of Perfection is presented in three parts that we call "Views":

1) The world we all live in is perfect in all its particulars. This includes you and everything else. This is the statement of the Way. We call this part "The View from Perfection."

2) Next we take a look at trouble. There is apparently an endless supply of this within perfection. But being perfect, it turns out that trouble is essentially voluntary and can readily be avoided. We call this part "The View from the Garden" and take you on an unfamiliar journey through a familiar myth.

3) Finally we take a look at the pathway to (and from) paradise. We call this part "The View from Here."

You are invited to read on. Take a look at perfection. It is the big secret.



# THE WAY OF PERFECTION

## Part I

### THE VIEW FROM PERFECTION

The Way of Perfection carries the message that the lives we lead and the world we lead them in are all perfect, in every respect. This is called the "perfection view."

The perfection view is not limited to just parts of our lives or parts of this world nor does it have in mind a future perfectibility. It holds that perfection was the nature of creation from the outset and remains fully present in us and everything else.

This is certainly not a mainstream view, at least not yet. Ordinary consciousness tends to focus on differences. The news focuses on conflict between people and their groups; art focuses on the conflict between colors and shapes, or sounds. Our sensory apparatus is naturally attracted by sensation.

Though seldom recognized, perfection is not hidden from our view. It underlies the activities of our lives, forming the field within which all sensations take place. There everything is working smoothly, all parts fit together with exquisite ease, work together effortlessly and create for us this magical realm we call our lives, in which we can imagine or fantasize anything we want.

The perfection view, as you will see, is not naïve, not utopian. It is grounded in the same reality we all share. It offers itself to you as a possible alternate or addition to your world-view. Perfection is a powerful world-view because it transcends daily life while including it. As an

attitude it offers a quite useful balance into which everything fits and which is therefore durable and dependable.

**1. Perfection, the Word.** Because the perfection view is going to reveal itself in language, it first wishes to attend to the meaning of its name.

There is, to start with, a culturally popular understanding of perfection as a state that is without blemish or defect. All other states become, by definition, imperfect. In order to qualify as perfect under this thinking, a thing would have to be flawless, absolutely complete, and unchanging. But as you can see, this definition of perfection automatically excludes anything human along with virtually everything else, all of which is constantly changing.

Perfection from this point of view is a theological conception, an idea of fixed completion that describes an idea of deity but excludes us and our lives. There is wide agreement in our culture that "nothing is perfect," and when you look at perfection this way, that is true. Nothing that actually exists could qualify.

The perfection view focuses instead on what might be called "working perfection." One of our dictionaries defines perfection as a condition that is "thoroughly effectual, meeting the requirements of the occasion." Or, as the Encarta definition on our Macintosh has it: "the quality of something that is as good or suitable as it can possibly be." This way of looking at perfection does not imply a completed, unchanging state but one that has hope in it, that is flexible and adaptable, living and growing.

The perfection view is that all of creation works perfectly in this way, as suitable as it could possibly be,

always meeting all requirements of its purpose. Of course, this means we must inquire into purpose: we can only measure how well creation is doing if we know what it is doing.

**2. The Purpose of Creation.** Any purpose that could be ascribed to creation would have had to be present at its beginning. The Hindu tradition says it all started when God uttered the sound: "aum." The New Testament says it was the "word." Our science likens it to a big bang. Whatever it may have sounded like, its purpose would have had to be present at the first decibel, and would indeed have had to be present just before the initial sound took place.

We can't go back and find out, but we do know that all of creation emerged at once, so whatever the purpose of that first sound is or was, it has to include all of creation. That purpose therefore won't be found by selecting out parts of creation to contrast with other parts. The purpose of creation will not itself be dual; it is not going to be the opposite of anything or a part of anything.

Let's consider how that first utterance became us. Whatever it may have sounded like, energy spewed forth, outward in all directions, all at once. This released energy flew in an apparently chaotic manner, but as we now know there was more to it than that. Complex energy patterns were present, patterns that repel and other patterns that attract; somehow these patterns induced some of those out-rushing energies to abandon their trajectories and join together with other energies to form the hard stuff we call matter. Galaxies and stars and planets all derived from that initial energy, as did biology and us.

The way energy translates itself into form is by

slowing down; energies drawn together coalesce into tiny particles. These are atoms, the basic building blocks of the physical world. They are mostly empty and they spin, they form orbits together and create molecules that are also mostly empty. Our hard physical world and its contents consist of constantly rotating little particles made of energy, orbiting together with huge spaces between them. From atoms on up it's all constructed like a galaxy, a lot of comparatively small objects orbiting around in what is mostly emptiness.

When humans think of purpose, we like to think in linear terms, starting somewhere and going from there to a conclusion. We like a purpose with a beginning, a function to fill, and a result. But it is apparent that this is not the way of fundamental creation, where the way things work is by spinning around each other, no part of it moving in straight lines. Whatever the purpose of this creation, it won't be found in a linear concept. It won't be a goal such as evolution or the attainment of an ideal state or anything like that. Those are nice thoughts, and worth working for, but they are comparative, dual in their nature, and do not include everything.

For any definition of creation's purpose then, we are going to have to look at the result to find the cause. Suppose we posit that what the big bang produced tells us what it intended. What has it produced? Everything. So the perfection view is that the purpose of the big bang was creation, all of it. The whole of creation comes with no discernable independent direction or goal, no purpose that starts, accomplishes something, and ends. The perfection view takes this to mean that existence is its own purpose. The purpose of the big bang was to create, and the purpose of that creation is to exist.

Let's focus in a bit. Humans are a part of creation. Is

there an overall purpose for humans? That is a question much argued over in religions and philosophy and wars, with proposals that all have one thing in common – they favor some part over some other part. But partial answers can only describe a part. As with creation, any real purpose for all of humanity will have to include all of humanity. And since once again we cannot go back to the beginning of humanity to learn why, we need to look at the whole of humanity to gauge its purpose.

What about the whole of humanity? We all have bodies, sensory apparatus, we develop the ability to observe ourselves, we have parents and are born young and die older. Where we vary from each other is in the kinds of experience we have, not only what we experience outside us but what we experience inside ourselves as well. The bewildering variety of experiences need not blind us to their underlying unity; they are all experiences.

We may not comprehend what is behind creation but we know what to do with it - we experience it. Experience is what humans do and appear to be designed for; it is apparently innate in human existence. And so, in the perfection view, the purpose of all humanity is experience - simply experience, not necessarily of one kind or another. The quality or nature of the experience is up to the individual.

That brings us to the question whether this purpose is carried out perfectly. How suited is this creation for being experienced? And how suited are humans to experience it?

Creation provides conditions – which are referred to here as "illusions" – within which humans design their own experiences.

### 3. Perfection and the Three Levels of Illusion:

Many ancient spiritual teachings hammered away at the illusory nature of our lives and worlds. Because they are illusions, the teachings say, they are impermanent and therefore unreal and have no importance. They are to be overcome. This is a perfectly valid view and has lots of adherents to this day, but it leaves a sour taste. What are we doing here in a useless world? What point was there in creating this world when all we are supposed to do with it is get out?

Suppose we looked at these illusions instead as useful, as if they were gifts imbued with the perfection of the field out of which they emerge? This is the way the perfection view begins.

For ease of inquiry, the perfection view divides the illusory realm into three levels:

**a. Creation as Illusion.** It is no secret that what we call matter is actually energy. Even though we know that it is made up almost entirely of emptiness, we experience it as solid.

Matter looks and feels real, responds to our measuring devices and obeys some of our mathematics. It is dependable, and so there is widespread agreement among humans that matter is actually "there."

But as scientific inquiry delves down smaller and smaller, deep into what is going on inside the atomic structure of matter, we find that matter changes as we look at it. Near the interface between energy and matter the dependable nature of matter disappears and becomes movable and flexible, not bound by physical laws, more like intelligent energy.

As we approach this interface where matter isn't really matter, we begin to see part of what those ancients were trying to tell us: our solid world isn't solid at all; it's all made of moving particles (themselves made of energy) posing as dependable form. It is such a clever illusion that almost every human accepts it as real no matter how much science knows about its true nature.

Is it fair to call this physical world illusory? Humans appear to have been perfectly evolved to experience it as firm and real. Still, we know it is not and so in the perfection view it is the first level of illusion.

This is a very benign level of illusion. It gives us bodies and biology and therefore what we call "life." Into it we are born and have our existence as humans. It is the field within which all human existence takes place. There is nothing here that chooses some aspects of itself over others or otherwise results in harm. It is neutral and scrupulously fair. This first level of illusion qualifies as "thoroughly effectual, meeting the requirements of the occasion." In the perfection view, it is perfect for its purpose.

One of the worldwide things we as humans do upon awakening in this first level of illusion is to identify ourselves, and this brings us to the second level of illusion.

**b. Identity as Illusion.** It is one of those attributes of creation that none of it comes in its completed state. Everything begins, from seed/soil or sperm/egg or the rubbing of tectonic plates, and from that beginning, develops. That includes humans. We do start out each life as male or female, our parentage and race are established and we are older or younger than our siblings. This is our framework, our starting identity. As we grow we select

traits and attitudes that suit us and reject those that do not. We like or do not like ourselves. We develop personality and distinctness from those around us.

We create this identity during our lifetimes and we do not take it with us when we go. It is a worldly thing, a rich and valuable experience, but ephemeral. And, being essentially imagined by us, is yet another level of illusion.

Our human desires diverge at this level of the illusory realms, and we develop our separate selves and our separate stories. We select our general attitudes and within them develop opinions, sometimes held firmly as what we call beliefs. Here we appreciate a nice thing, can be delighted by the beauty of a flower, distraught by what looks like an accident or an injury. Here we get to feel separate, to develop our own unique self.

Each of us is living a separate identity and we react to the things life brings us individually, and often quite differently, from each other.

Where there was widespread agreement on the nature of the physical world in the first level of illusion, here in the second level of identity that agreement separates out into individual points of view. The dependable material forms here begin to produce very different feelings and reactions (realities) in the humans who are experiencing them. The experience at this level becomes personal and much more vivid.

At this level, the nature of the life experience for each individual depends on what that individual is paying attention to. Thus to some it is a "dog-eat-dog world out there" while at the same time to others it is so safe it is boring. If we look about hesitantly we will quickly find many unsettling conditions warranting hesitation. If we

hunger for change the present may become painful. If we are impatient, those who move more slowly become obstacles; if we lag we are prodded along. We set the speed and get quite varied experiences. We can dramatically alter any experience by liking it or not liking it. Serenity is an option, but it reduces the experiencing.

Our identity is a lens through which we look at life and so of the way life is going to look to us. Our identity guides our selection of experiences and how we will feel about them. In the realms of identity, our idea of "objective reality" is so colored and shaped and selected by our identity choices that creation essentially amounts to a projection of ourselves, a mirror. We have programmed ourselves to find ourselves wherever we look.

Others may have their opinions about your identity, and some may try to influence you, but no one has the power to decide for you who you are. Because we operate with free will, our identity is to be worked out by ourselves. We do it primarily by choosing: Every one of us looks outward to a physical world and inward to mind realms that offer vastly more experiences than could be selected in any lifetime. Choices are made from what is offered. Out of all the experiences that result, only a few are chosen to "matter"—to be added to our personal story of what matters to us. We are the ones who do the choosing.

Look at the perfection behind all this. Our "life" that each of us separately leads seems utterly real, and yet most of it is just a reflection of what we project on it. We live here on one planet with one style of matter, and within it billions of humans can each find their own place and story, creating these out of themselves. This illusion creates vast realms for experience without any cost in resources. The perfection view considers this level of illusion as perfect

for its purpose.

These two levels of our illusions appear to be harmless. The physical world is simply there, and identities are unlimited. No conflict is built in to this. There is no shortage, no opening for harm. This could still be paradise.

There is still one more layer of the illusion, however; a powerful, entrancing layer. In it lies fear with its brand new possibility of negative inner states; it is the home of trouble, an independent realm of exciting possibilities.

**c. Fear as Illusion.** Everyone will encounter fear and so it is useful to have some understanding of it. The language of our culture doesn't help much. We have no alternate word, for example, to differentiate between a biological reaction to a real threat on the one hand and, on the other hand, to some mental trembling at what may happen to us tomorrow.

When a threat to our biological existence presents itself in real time, our whole being reacts. Adrenaline is pumped into the system; all senses go on alert. We are charged with energy and ready to fly or defend. Everything about our reaction is designed to protect us. Biologically speaking, this is a very healthy reaction.

Our language refers to that as "fear" but uses the same word to describe feelings projected out into time and space, worry about something that may happen in the future, guilt at what we have done in the past; that is to say, fear-like concerns over things not actually happening right now.

There is a vast difference between these two. True fear is built in to the biological nature of all complex living

creatures. But the inner state of projected apprehension over conditions in some other time or some other space (that is, in our imaginations) provides no biological benefits and is apparently unique to humans. It is an illusory state that looks and feels like real fear but is really just imitating it. For want of a better term, we will refer to it as "projected fear."

Projected fear is an illusion of very expansive dimensions. The world can now not only appear to be outside us and other than us, but if we look at it with our new identities and through a lens of projected fear, it can now possibly hurt us. It becomes risky, a world we need to be on guard about, careful. It can even take on a sinister quality. Other people may not be our friends. We may feel the need to protect ourselves, to develop abilities to deceive or defend. We might invent the idea of power as a way to offset the dangers.

The possibilities for experience here in the realm of projected fear extend way beyond the biological call for attentiveness and caution. Projected fear can add intensity to every meeting, excitement to what might be around the next corner. Projected fear can make a significant event out of what might otherwise be dismissed. The experience potential of everyday life is deepened and enhanced profoundly, because with projected fear everything might really mean something.

This third level of illusion is effective at providing zest to the mundane, but it doesn't come cheap. Projected fear is the creative basis for all emotional negativity. Without projected fear, there is no shame, no guilt, no blame, no resentment. Envy cannot exist without it, nor jealousy. Projected fear is the essential building block of all negative states of mind. Among its progeny are those all-time winners in experiential intensity: hate and war.

Stated another way, without projected fear, none of these experiences would be available. As unfortunate as they may seem to the peaceful potential of human life, negative mind states are an included part of the third level of illusion. And since it is perfection that is being unveiled here it may be appropriate to mention that these negative experiences have proved to be very popular. There are always plenty of volunteers to explore them, even to leap in and live them as if they were real.

This good-and-evil level of illusion is a real experience generator. But as we are beginning to see in our culture and lives, overindulgence in its excitements appears to carry health risks. Like true fear, projected fear arouses in us chemical and nervous system conditions appropriate to immediate action. But here, where the fear is projected elsewhere and nothing can be done immediately, these conditions have nowhere to go and can't be acted out. The energy stirs us up and then just sits there. Stress naturally emerges bringing its progeny of ill health.

Still, let us be clear: Stress provides its own experiences, as does ill health. Many of us humans find them quite consuming.

It is valuable to remember the illusory nature of projected fear: Though it can look and feel as real as real fear, it is merely a projection of our own out into time and space, where only our ideas really exist. It is not required by survival nor, because it shortens our lives, does it appear to further the survival of our species.

Projected fear is the realm of excitement; when one has had sufficient excitement of that kind, it is perfectly possible to depart from that realm and live happily ever

after in the nonjudgmental levels. Still, the illusion of good and evil is so enticing (it is such a real illusion) that we can forget it is entirely voluntary, we can forget how we got there and how to get out. Part II, the View from the Garden, takes this up in detail. It examines the gateway to the realm of projected fear, how we get in to that realm and how we get out.

#### **4. The Way Illusions Work**

We are here as humans to experience, and illusions are here to help us do that. They have certain operating procedures.

It is in the nature of all illusion, at any level, that in order to enter the illusion we surrender clarity and awareness in return for drama and intensity. It is an individual process, each of us aiming for the level of experience that attracts us. In general it is a fair formula: The more intensely we want to experience, the more profoundly we must believe the illusion. We remove our attention from the larger picture, the context in which the illusion is taking place, in order to make the illusion seem real.

Looking at this from the other direction, the more real an illusion seems to us, the less awareness we will have of the larger context in which it is taking place. The process in each of us is partly conscious and partly not, but one way or the other we decide how far in we want to go. Illusions are by subscription only; they work only as long as we buy in.

How do illusions rate as experience enhancers? You might say that illusions are miraculous; they are certainly magical; at each level illusion creates a reality out of nothing. They are one of our main tools to regulate the

kind and degree of experience we want to have, and they are free and voluntary.

And so we see, behind all levels of illusion, the perfection. It is shining through every appearance, underlying every human condition, bringing experience that, whether you love it or hate it, was drawn by your attraction and is for your edification. Each of us calls our experience to us; we cannot but have our destiny.

## **5. The Perfection behind it All**

It is probably apparent by now that the Way of Perfection is not focused on the eternal struggle between good and evil. It is concerned instead with the context, the realm within which these things play out their roles. That realm is created in perfection, so the perfection view follows that perfection out into the daily experience of creation.

Suppose that you are viewing your outer and inner reality as if it were perfect? This is the way things would look: Everyone and everything outside you and inside you is right. This is a right that is not the opposite of wrong. All are innocent. Neither you nor anyone else has ever committed an actual wrong because there is no such thing. Sin, if anything, is simple ignorance of the whole. Judgments we might harbor constitute burdens we are carrying around to no purpose.

Your experiences are your own, and so they are perfect for you. Your life is your own creation. In perfection everything fits. And if a particular part of your life has trouble in it, then that is within perfection, suited for your own particular experience in this life. Experiences that involve trouble are particularly memorable and often bring important messages for us.

In the view from perfection the nature of everything is perfect and there is nothing to blame; since there is no blame, there is no guilt. Things are as they are and we are free to want them to be some other way. You are free to be who you are, and all others are free to be who they are. There are consequences to every act. Society is free to regulate behavior for the common good.

In other words, the perfection view doesn't change anything on the outside. It is the way we look at it that changes. From perfection it is unnecessary to judge things. We have accepted everything on the outside and on our inside as being as they are: right, not the opposite of wrong. This does not mean we have acquiesced in injustice. We continue to be concerned about things and to seek betterment. We can resist any condition with all our will. It's just that we no longer need to find anything wrong in order to resist it or change it. Things are as they are; we are as we are.

It is very important to each of us how we look at the world because the way we look at it is the way it is going to be for us. There isn't any official way to look at the world or any right way or wrong way. There are a lot of ways to look at the world and each brings its own results.

The perfection view is being offered to you as a perfectly plausible way to look at the world. It comes from a place deeper than the duality of life and it can provide you with a very pleasant and illuminating attitude. As its name implies, the perfection view is not so much an idea or a belief system as a practice, a way of looking at things. So we find perfection by looking for it, training our own habits of observation and reaction, working within. Part of the perfection is this: once we start looking, perfection begins to show itself to us, appearing almost magically

through the din of blame and justification. It is always there

# THE WAY OF PERFECTION

## Part II

### THE VIEW FROM THE GARDEN

The perfection of existence includes every part of it. This of course includes trouble, of which there appears to be an abundant supply, and so we are obliged to inquire into the perfect nature of trouble.

In the View from Perfection we looked at three levels of illusion. The first level, of physical reality, and the second, of identity, don't have within them what we might think of as trouble. They do have the natural abruptness of change, of birth and death and growth and decline. But without the influence of the third level of illusion these do not turn into trouble.

The view from perfection respects trouble and acknowledges its role in the totality of things. Trouble is a great enhancer of experience. But for all its virtues trouble can hurt, and it may be that some of you would like to extract yourselves from it. One of the unexpected virtues of seeing things with the view from perfection is that trouble takes its place and can be seen for what it is.

This View from the Garden is about old scripture, about the very well known but widely misunderstood old testament recitation of the Garden of Eden. Its true message is an explanation of our relationship to God and paradise. Because it describes exactly what it is that takes us out of paradise, the message has an importance both practical and transcendental for all of us at this time.

In the story, God, having created the prototype

humans, Adam and Eve, then creates a garden for them to live in. The myth makes clear that this garden is paradise: "every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food." The humans had free run of the garden and everything they needed; their freedom was complete, except for one caution: If they ate from one tree, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, then there would be dire consequences.

Everyone knows what happened: They ate, dire consequences duly followed, and here we are.

Now there is a currently widespread moralistic interpretation of the story you are all aware of. It is essentially that humans were forbidden to do something by God and yet did it. They sinned, were punished, and we are living the consequences of that sin to this day.

This is the dread concept of "original sin," a very unhappy bit of theology according to which we are all stained and in need of salvation. According to this view, we are born in sin and there is nothing we can do about it. This moralistic interpretation has found its home in the dark side of the Christian church ever since it was invented.

Invented? Yes. With all respect, essentially so, by the Apostle Paul, a Jew from Tarsus in present day Turkey who also claimed to be a Roman citizen. He first killed Christians for the Romans and then went on to become the organizer of the early Christian church. He introduced the idea of original sin in Romans 5:12 where, trying to explain why it was that our saviour had allowed himself to be killed, Paul asserted that sin came into the world through Adam in the garden and spread to everyone and that Christ overcame this original sin by overcoming death. In other words, by Adam's acts in the garden every human had been born in sin. The death of Jesus gave us a way to

overcome that sin and so had meaning and purpose.

Paul never met Jesus. He wrote this interpretation in A.D. 57, a quarter century after the death of Jesus and a minimum of fifteen hundred years after the Garden Story was written. The idea that Adam had sinned or had caused a permanent curse to fall upon all who followed had barely appeared in all those years and had no following to speak of. It became popular only after Paul adopted it and for this reason is called in academic circles the "Pauline" interpretation. It is all his. There is no support for it anywhere in the teachings of Jesus. Even throughout the entire Old Testament, including the Garden Story itself, the support is spotty and ambiguous.

The Pauline interpretation is orthodoxy. We've all been influenced by it, and it has its own role in perfection. But it obscures a much more obvious and much more liberating meaning of the Garden Story. The perfection view looks at the story as it is written and finds a message of a very different nature.

In the perfection view Adam and Eve are not historical people who lived long ago, and the garden is not somewhere else. Their story is the story of paradise and the illusion of good and evil, of how we enter that illusion, what happens to us when we get there, and how to leave it and re-enter paradise. It tells us, in short, what we need to know for our spiritual journey, in a way designed for minds brought up in the Judeo-Christian-Muslim thought fields.

Let's take a short walk through the Garden of Eden. The story is quoted from the original King James version with commentary focussed on both the perfection view and the Pauline, moralistic, interpretation. The story is short and our path takes us just ten steps along.

## **Step 1. Prologue. The context of the story.**

The Garden Story appears immediately after our creation myth in the Book of Genesis, first book of the Old Testament. Perhaps you will recall the creation story: God created the heaven and the earth, and then created light, saw that it was good, and proceeded to create night and day, and to gather the waters together so the dry land would appear. In six periods called "days" God caused the basic forms of all plants and all animals to be created, and man as well. At the end of the sixth day "God saw every thing that he had made, and behold, it was very good."

The second book of Genesis starts with God resting on the seventh day. The story of creation is then retold in highly summarized form. The order of events given there is pretty much how it must have happened, whoever or whatever was the operative cause and however long a "day" might have been.

As for man, he is made out of the dust and God "breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul." There is no doubt that humans are meant to be special: "So God created man in his own image; in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them."

Four things to note as we move into the Garden Story:

a. God is not named. This is not the deity of any religion, but the creator of the world, whatever name might be used.

b. This was all done without conflict; that is, God encountered no enemies in bringing about creation. So this

God is not within duality, is not the opposite of any devil or force. God also is never identified as male or female or even as a person.

c. Humans were not accidental but carefully and thoughtfully put together. We are made in God's image, not vice versa.

d. God has twice looked at the entire creation and once pronounced it "good" and once "very good".

## **Step 2. Into the Garden. What are things like there?**

The Garden is described in the second book of Genesis, chapters 8 and 9:

8. And the Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed.

9. And out of the ground made the Lord God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

Some things to notice here:

a. it is a garden where humans are placed, not a desert or a city or a prison or a heaven or a hell. And in that garden is everything a human could want or desire, life, beauty and food in abundance.

b. The garden conveys paradise, and life in paradise conveys a peaceful, free and elevated state of human existence. In this sense it would seem to represent the same

state as "salvation" or "enlightenment" or the other terms used to describe the state of human transcendence.

c. This paradise is the natural home of humans. It is where God has placed us.

### **Step 3. Nature of Adam and Eve. Who were these folks?**

Adam and Eve are not presented mythologically but are intended to represent humans in the physical state. We know this because the story tells us they needed food to survive, and just outside the Garden Story we are told that, when Eve was to be formed out of one of Adam's ribs, it was necessary to anaesthetize Adam (God caused a "deep sleep to fall upon" him).

We also know that the relationship between Adam and Eve was very close and trusting, much like what you would think of a relationship in paradise: "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife; and they shall be one flesh."

We know one more thing about these two and their circumstances in paradise from Genesis 2:25, that "they were both naked, the man and his wife, and they were not ashamed."

So the story tells us that these things exist in paradise: physical reality, identity, genders, marriage, nakedness. And we know one thing that does not exist there: shame.

This is useful information. If we are looking about us to see what is part of paradise and what is not, these are some clear guidelines.

#### **Step 4. God's admonition. How humans were singled out to possess free will.**

Next, in a very strange and haunting passage in 2 Genesis 16 and 17, humans are admonished about the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil:

16. And the Lord God  
commanded the man, saying,  
of every tree of the garden thou  
mayest fully eat:

17. But of the tree of the  
knowledge of good and evil,  
thou shalt not eat of it: for in the  
day that thou eatest thereof  
thou shalt surely die.

This part of the story is so familiar to us that we forget how strange it is. For one thing, God has already created "great whales, and every living creature that moveth . . . and every winged fowl . . ." Not one of these was forbidden to do anything. Each can freely follow its own instinct and imprint. They could enjoy the fruit of this tree and all others without consequence. Why are humans singled out in this unusual way?

And another strange part of the story is that this dangerous tree was not hidden, not guarded or kept out of reach. No, it is instead singled out as being of major importance and is, as we will see, placed apparently in full view near the center of the garden.

There is a temptation planted in the Garden from the beginning, isn't there?

The story has here introduced us to "free will." Every non-human creature was free to be itself; God imposed for them no obstacle, no temptation, no law to violate, and thus no freedom to violate anything. But Adam and Eve are specifically given a rule to follow and thus a means by which they could act contrary to God's will. Only humans are given this opportunity. It is called free will because it gives us uniquely the freedom to act contrary to what we perceive as God's will; to act, that is, according to our own personal will.

Notice that, according to this Garden Story, free will for humans is built in, an inherent part of our nature. It isn't a mistake and it isn't optional either. Everyone has the unavoidable gift of exercising free will.

Another important element in this passage is the full name of the tree: It is the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. This is descriptive of course, meaning that the fruit of the tree will give this knowledge to any human who eats it. It's prohibition strongly suggests that this knowledge is not elsewhere available in the garden – that there is no consciousness in paradise of dividing creation into that which is good and that which is evil.

It is notable too that although humans are given free will, we are given only one way to exercise it.

Genesis 2 gave us the setting. Now, in Genesis 3, the action is ready to commence.

### **Step 5. The plot thickens.**

The famous serpent makes its entrance into the Garden Story:

1. NOW THE serpent was more subtil then any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?
2. And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden;
3. But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die.
4. And the serpent said unto the woman, ye shall not surely die:
5. For God doth know, that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.

This is often referred to as the "temptation," with good reason. But of course the temptation has been inherent in the story from the beginning; the serpent just brought the situation to a head.

Let's take some notes on the serpent's role:

- a. The serpent was already an ancient symbol for wisdom and there is no reason to think it has any other connotation here.
- b. He gives Eve a perfectly valid reason to eat the fruit, an affirmative desire. If she eats it her eyes will be opened and she will be as a god, knowing good and evil.

This is pretty heady stuff. Eve has no reason to distrust the serpent; it is part of what God has created here in the garden, and is "subtil" – smart. What is being offered by the serpent? To be as a god. Wouldn't you be tempted? Doesn't it sound a little like the serpent is describing what we think of as the spiritual path?

c. The serpent tells Eve also that she will not die from eating the fruit, even though God has been quoted earlier as saying that she surely would do so. We will look later at these different points of view on what it means to die.

### **Step 6. The eating of the fruit.**

The pivotal dramatic moment in the story takes place in the next short chapter 6 of 3 Genesis:

6. And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat.

Note Eve's reasons for eating the fruit: that it was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and that it would make her wise. These are all good, rational reasons. There is no suggestion of wantonness, of defiance of God. In fact, isn't there an innocence about her?

This single act of eating, interpreted from the Pauline point of view, is a sin so severe as to condemn all future generations. But the act of eating a fruit is really quite a guilt-free sort of behavior, isn't it? And isn't that the actual tone in the story? The perfection view reads no defiance into Eve's behavior; she ate for the reason given in the

story, that she thought the knowledge of good and evil would make her wise.

### **Step 7. The effects of the Fruit.**

The perfection view invites you to take careful note of what it is that actually happens just after the fruit is eaten and before any possibility of judgment can appear. That comes next in chapters 7 through 10 where are depicted the immediate aftereffects in Adam and Eve.

7. And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons.

8. And they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden.

9. And the Lord God called unto Adam, and said unto him, where art thou?

10. And he said, I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.

Things to note about this passage:

a. We have here a precise description of how the fruit affects one who eats it. Neither Adam nor Eve has been judged. This is what actually happens when we enter the illusion of good and evil: there is a pronounced and abrupt

change in mind state, a new and fear-filled way of looking at things.

b. Adam is afraid. Of what? The Pauline version presumes that Adam was afraid of God because he had sinned. But that is not consistent with the story. Adam said: "I was afraid because I was naked." He has always been naked, nothing external has changed, so his response means fear has arisen in him, a new kind of fear not based on danger but on an idea.

We have here the introduction of what is described in *The View From Perfection* as "projected fear." This is not real fear, the helpful, healthy kind that arises when there is a present threat to the body. This is a make-believe fear. It feels and affects us like real fear, but it is not directed at anything we can do anything about.

c. The state of mind which the fruit brings about - eyes opened to the knowledge of good and evil, being as gods and making our judgments - brings with it projected fear. It is both automatic and instantaneous. There is no evidence that it is an avoidable consequence.

d. We also see that this projected fear either causes or accompanies certain other experiences. For example, what does it mean that their eyes were opened and they "knew" they were naked? Self-judgment has come into being, something that did not exist in the garden before.

e. What does it mean that they "hid" their nakedness? Certainly that they were ashamed of it. And so shame has come into being.

We now have projected fear and its progeny, self-judgment and shame, as what we'll call "fruit effects" - apparently direct and automatic results of eating the fruit.

God has not yet taken note of their transgression and the issue of sin and consequences has not arisen; these new negative elements of consciousness arose on their own, right inside the minds of our eaters of the fruit, the moment they "knew" good and evil. Trouble has been introduced.

### **Step 8. God's reaction.**

The story moves into a conversation between God and the participants:

11. And he said, who told thee that thou wast naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldst not eat?

12. And the man said, the woman whom thou gavst to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat.

13. And the Lord God said unto the woman, what is this that thou hast done? And the woman said, the serpent beguiled me, and I did eat.

a. Now the perfect relationship between Adam and Eve begins to unravel; Adam blames her; she blames the serpent. And so blame and therefore guilt are added to our list of built-in consequences, the fruit effects.

b. A great change has come over Adam and Eve. Even though their external world remains as it was, their reaction to it demonstrates an alteration in their way of looking at things. It becomes apparent that the eating of the fruit produces a mind change. Is it an hallucination? Because it distorts their awareness of their surroundings, is

it fair to call it a delusion? At least it is an illusion. The illusion of good and evil.

c. Note that although the tone of God's language is peremptory, there is no mention on God's part of sin, blame or guilt. Adam and Eve seem to be experiencing these things but God has made no accusation.

### **Step 9. God describes how things are going to be.**

The tone of the story takes a turn. The tone of God's voice becomes strident. This is what God says:

14. And the Lord God said unto the serpent, because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon they belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life.

15. And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.

16. Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee.

17. And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast harkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground

for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life;

18. Thorns and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field;

19. In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return onto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.

Notes on this passage:

a. It is from these chapters that the moralistic version of Paul gains its primary claim to validity. It is true that our exercise of free will got us into this predicament. It is not too hard to imagine anger in God's statements or to imagine that punishment is being meted out.

But anger and punishment have to be imagined because they are not in the story. Not here nor elsewhere in the story is there any clear statement of anger or of punishment. Although blaming has previously entered the story when Adam blamed Eve and she blamed the serpent, no statement of blame is made here. There is no mention whatever of "sin."

b. Once the fruit has been eaten and one's mind has entered the illusion of good and evil, then the Pauline interpretation tends to follow. That is, it is natural to see good and evil in the story when the story is interpreted from outside the Garden, from within the illusion of good and evil.

The perfection view, however, looks at this passage

from a pre-injection point of view, the view from within the Garden. It interprets these passages as forthright descriptions of how life is out here in the realm of the knowing of good and evil. Just as the initial human reactions to the knowledge: projected fear, self-judgment, shame, blame, arise from the knowledge itself, so do all the portents of trouble laid out in these chapters. The passage could reflect anger and punishment on God's part, or not, but either way it tells us that this consciousness of good and evil cannot exist in paradise and must take place outside the Garden, obviously a place of much more vivid experiences.

c. God's description is actually a pretty accurate depiction of how life can be out here, outside the Garden.

### **Step 10. We are sent out of the Garden.**

In these last of the Garden Story's chapters God sends us off and tells why:

20. And Adam called his wife's name Eve; because she was the mother of all living.

21. Unto Adam also, and to his wife did the Lord God make coats of skins, and clothed them.

22. And the Lord God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever:

23. Therefore the Lord God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from where he was taken.

24. So he drove out the man: and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life.

And a few notes on this final step:

a. In Chapter 21 God is making clothes for Adam and Eve, an image suggesting a loving God rather than of one that is angry and punishing His sinful creatures.

b. In Chapter 22 God describes why humans are being banished from the Garden. Here, if the story wanted to tell of Adam and Eve sinning, is the exact place where it should appear. But there is no mention of sin or punishment. God instead says that the reason is to keep us from becoming immortal by eating from the tree of life.

c. Chapter 24 tells how the Garden is guarded. And why. There are guards, and a flaming sword, for what? To keep us out? That is not what it says. It is instead to "keep the way of the tree of life." That is, to keep us in our good-and-evil state of mind from becoming immortal, the same reason we were sent forth in the first place.

d. Also in these last chapters we have the only clue the story gives us about the puzzle of the different meanings of "die," about whether Adam and Eve would "surely die" upon eating the fruit of good and evil. Recall that God said they would and the serpent said they would not. We now know what God meant: that they could not engage in the imagining of good and evil in the Garden

and would have to go. To God perhaps that was death, to move away from the Garden and away from God's daily presence.

That brings us to the end of our walk in the Garden. That's the whole story as it appears in Genesis; nothing has been left out.

Let's summarize:

**Summary: the moralistic view - original sin.**

The attribution of sin and punishment to the Garden Story requires, as the story itself demonstrates, considerable stretching. There is no direct evidence to be found, and in crucial spots where sin and/or punishment would most likely be mentioned if they were the point of the story, they are not to be found. There is no reference anywhere to sin.

When Paul, a quarter century after Jesus' death, interpreted the story in terms of original sin redeemed, he did it with a purpose. That is to say, the interpretation had useful side benefits for his theology in that it gave the ignominious death of God's own son a meaning and mystical purpose. Undoubtedly the interpretation continues to have other side benefits for institutionalized religion. There is likely to be a large vested interest for example in the concept that all people are sinners and need the help of church and God (and other leaders) to arise out of their deprived state. There appear to be plenty of people willing to be sinners. These factors suggest that the moral interpretation is serving its own purposes in behalf of a strong constituency, and to that constituency it may not matter very much what the scripture actually means.

The View from the Garden has perhaps not treated

the moralistic interpretation with the respect and kindly insights that a fair evaluation of such a widely accepted point of view might deserve. It's not because it is being judged; it is perfect at what it is. However, the idea of original sin, that everyone is condemned from the outset, is as close to the opposite of the Way of universal perfection as you can get. The perfection view takes the same evidence underlying the idea of universal imperfection and comes instead to the conclusion that perfection is everywhere. There's a surprisingly thin dividing line between the two and both have their truth. That dividing line is being explored here and so the moralistic interpretation has been used as a reference point in presenting perfection. The author hopes you'll excuse this; we have been hard pressed to present in words a perfection that has no opposite.

### **Summary: the perfection view.**

As you have seen, the perfection view pretty much takes the story at its face value: Adam and Eve were given a garden in which to dwell. Everything was provided for them. There was one prohibition: not to partake of the knowledge of good and evil. They did so. A new mental state arose in their minds, the knowledge of good and evil, which caused them to experience their own natural state with shame and fear. They were not allowed to remain in paradise in this condition. God sent them forth.

Here is the perfection view of the Garden Story in summary form with some summary commentary thrown in:

- Adam and Eve are prototypical; that is, they are meant to be all of us.

- The Garden is our natural home. Paradise was created for us.
- One attribute of paradise is that humans are given free will. That is, we can act contrary to God's will.
- However, there is only one way to act contrary to God's will and that is to do the one thing God told us not to do, to take on the knowledge of good and evil, to judge. It is a voluntary act.
- The creator has previously made clear the creator's own judgment of creation. It was simply good. Now when one of us decides instead to divide it into good and evil, we create evil. Evil does not exist in the un-judged original.
- There is great temptation to enter into judgment, to have one's eyes opened, to be as a god, to know good and evil. Eve went for it, and Adam, and lots of us. It is a great ego-booster to make our solemn judgments about this and that and then to feel very important for doing so.
- The down side is the evil that is created in that same process. It takes the form of projected fear, a fear-like reaction to something that is being imagined.
- Projected fear introduces malevolence and danger. It has great potential for the enhancement of human experience and excitement and provides the ground for all negative emotions, for trouble.
- God knew right away what had happened to Adam. Adam and Eve had been honored residents of paradise until they entered into this altered state,

this illusion of a division of creation into good and evil. When this was evident, God acted with alacrity. He banished that illusion from paradise.

- The illusion of good and evil is not real, and being not real, it is not intended to be a permanent state. It is denied access to the tree of life. It is an imagined world, teeming with intensity, meant to be experienced for a time only. How long? As long as we are willing to keep eating that fruit.
- Life outside the Garden, as God described it to our hapless mythical selves, sounded very hard. It could be read like a punishment but could as easily be just a clear description of what life is like in this illusion we have chosen.

### **Choosing.**

Which of these views, the moralistic or the perfection, is correct? Have we all been judged, or have we been advised not to judge?

There's really no one outside you to decide for you what the story is all about. You've read the story for yourself. You can take our word, if you like, that there's insignificant pre-Paul support for the idea of original sin and none at all within the teachings of Jesus. No one knows what the story's author really meant. No one has any greater authority to interpret it for you than you.

We'll leave the matter of choice with a side-view: Doesn't the moralistic view require us to do exactly what the story told us not to do? That is, isn't the moralistic view of the Garden Story a view from outside the Garden, a view already steeped in the illusion of good and evil?

## **The view from the Garden – conclusion.**

The Garden Story is a myth about daily living, for every single one of us. The exciting realm of judgment entices us but requires us to leave the Garden. Judging good from evil is the key; whenever we indulge it in that judging we take on all the consequences and excitements of projected fear, and paradise slips away. It doesn't actually go anywhere; we just lose sight of it and enter an imaginary world of excitement and peril.

Viewed from perfection, the illusion of good and evil is extremely clever and a very effective device for enhancing human experience. It is, it is fair to say, an amazing illusion. It is so attractive that those in it are often willing to put up with great pain just to remain there.

A final observation about the story: Did you notice that the serpent was correct all the way? Everything the serpent predicted came about. But he, like God before him in the Story, did not tell us the whole thing. We were not told how tempting this illusion is, nor how sticky it is once we are in it. We were only told some of its negative aspects after we were already on the way. The failure to mention these consequences certainly seems designed to enhance the attractiveness of the illusion. There is a view held by more than a few that the whole story was a set up, God and God's hench-serpent leading us into this vast realm of experience called good and evil. The experience of projected fear requires that we separate ourselves from God's will and believe ourselves to be out onto our own. The only way we could get there was to be forbidden and then to act.

In the way of perfection, it's all an exercise in hope and freedom, the plan of an understanding and loving

creator who is with us all the way, even though we pretend not to notice. Heaven is at hand, not in another place or another time, but within ourselves. Whenever we decide to stop judging, there it will be.

# THE WAY OF PERFECTION

## Part III

### THE VIEW FROM HERE

In the View from Perfection we saw that the purpose of human existence was experience and that our main tool for this is illusion. We saw that illusions are all voluntary; they derive their power (their "reality") from the participants, none of whom are compelled to participate. These illusions work perfectly to spin apparent reality out of nothing much. They provide each human on earth with an opportunity to devise his or her own identity, story, and purposes or goals.

The field underlying human existence has been created out of the energies unleashed by the initiating force of the universe, the aum/big bang sound that got it all going. No other energies have ever been inserted. The perfection of the pre-universe carries itself into the field that underlies human life, including its illusions; in this field the planetary orbits and the beating hearts are operating smoothly, predictably, and fit together effortlessly.

The View from Perfection posits that if the field out of which human existence emerges is perfect, then what emerges has to be perfect as well. It tested this position by looking at the operation of the universe according to its only known purpose: how well it supplies humans with a range of experiences to choose from and provides all humans with the power to make those choices.

Looked at in this way, the perfection of our very existence emerges. This is a perfection that does not

resolve opposites or unite warring factions, but includes them and accepts them for what they are.

Perfection was presented as a possible attitude, or world-view, for your own investigation and consideration. Because it includes everything, it is a stable and helpful attitude. And because it does not exclude anything, it enhances one's scope of vision, the breadth of things that can be comprehended.

Looking further into the nature of perfection, we investigated the nature of trouble and its place in creation. In the View from the Garden we saw that paradise is our home and explored the illusion called good-and-evil. It is a very effective illusion, but one which can only be experienced outside of paradise. We saw that this illusion produces powerful experiences but that some of them are negative and painful. We also saw that we enter that level of illusion through the simple act of judging.

We are given the free will to eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, to divide our world by judging it. It is a great privilege, empowering individual humans to act like gods. With it we can make our own decisions about what is good and what is not. Over time we each get to create a private world about ourselves out of those decisions, an identity far more complex and exciting than simply who we are. So it is a kind of miracle, this imaginary realm of good and evil, where we can act like we are really in charge of assigning blame and value and where we can believe our judgments are "the truth."

On the other hand the act of dividing into good and evil entails the creation of evil. Since evil cannot exist in paradise, we have to leave paradise to exercise this great privilege. There is nothing imperfect about this. It's like

having to go outdoors to smoke a cigarette. Our culture and many of us are outside the Garden, having the experience of assigning good and evil.

The Garden is not somewhere else. It is entirely a state of mind, an inner space in which things are accepted as they are and no value of good or evil, of rightness or wrongness, is assigned to them. Please notice that the entire process takes place in our minds. It is there that we divide what confronts us into that which is good and that which is evil. It is in those same minds that the transformation takes place when we eat of the fruit. Instead of seeing all things as good, as is the way of paradise, we divide them by assigning value to them. This takes us into the realm of good and evil and out of paradise. As we have seen, one of the immediate and major experiences upon entering this realm is of projected fear, the basic building block of all trouble. This also takes place in our minds.

There is no reason to suppose paradise is permanently closed; nothing in the story suggests that. If the consciousness of good and evil is what is not allowed in paradise, then we, if we stopped eating that fruit, wouldn't we naturally return to paradise? The perfection view thinks so. It is, after all, our home.

Here, in *The View from Here*, we will explore in a general, but hopefully helpful, way the gateway to the Garden, the portal by which, according to the Garden Story, we take ourselves out of and into paradise.

## **1. Defining good-and-evil consciousness.**

We know from the Garden Story that certain mind states always arise with the entrance into the realm of good and evil. These include shame, fear, guilt and blame,

among others. Whenever any of these are present, you can be reasonably sure that they lie within the illusion of good and evil.

But inquiry into the nature of the good-and-evil mindset as it exists within our selves is complicated by a lack of language. There is no word in the English language that means "assigning good and evil." The word "judgment" is the closest we have. It can mean the assignment of good and evil, but it also means, among other things, an order issued by a court or any decision reached after consideration and it also means making the right decision (as in "he used good judgment in finishing his studies"). So it is insufficiently precise to be of use here.

In order to help us focus exactly on the assigning of good and evil, we use the term "value judgment." Value judgments are decisions or choices in which we make a moral assignment of rightness or wrongness – that is, decisions or choices to which we have added our moral evaluation.

## **2. Why it is that good and evil are treated as equal.**

Do you recall that in our creation myth the creator has looked at all of creation and has determined that it was good? This use of the term "good" or "very good" was not partial. It applied to everything and so was not the lesser use of the term that applies to only some things, contrasting them at least by implication with other things that are not good.

It is this lesser use of the term, this singling out of some that are acceptable and creating thereby some that are not, that is a value judgment.

The perfection view sides with the creator who found

creation good. It is all good and all perfect. Please notice here the use of the term "all." There is no exception to this innate goodness. The moment any of us creates an exception, any exception, to what is good, we have invoked the lesser good and by this small value judgment we have entered the illusion of good and evil.

### **3. Value judgments and truth.**

Because a value judgment requires the assignment of imagined values to what simply is, it is a fiction. It can never be true. It is the only thing we know of that is barred from paradise, with cherubim guards to keep it out, because only truth can prosper there.

How about a statement that is factually true? Even this can constitute a value judgment if the speaker intends it as one. For example: "Her I.Q. score is 82" may be factually true but if uttered to demonstrate that she is unworthy, it becomes a value judgment. It is the speaker's opinion of unworthiness ("value") that makes of it a value judgment. We create these things inside ourselves, for ourselves, and it doesn't even matter if no one notices.

Remember please, our value judgments are just our opinions. They don't tell us anything about the object of our judgment; they only describe ourselves. Nothing in nature or outside it comes with a label as to its rightness or wrongness; value judgments are entirely supplied by us,

### **4. Preference vs. value judgment.**

Desire, which underlies all preferences, has long been seen as the source of suffering. The idea advanced by the ancients even today is that when you want something you will suffer if you don't get it, and if you get it then later you will lose it and you will suffer, and if it does not give

you the satisfaction you wanted from it, that causes suffering too.

The teachings of the Buddha are principally about how to eliminate desire or at least to regulate it so as to reduce the suffering it brings. The Bhagavad Gita sums up an older Hindu approach that allowed for desire so long as you could be detached from its outcome.

This is all insightful and valid. But the disciplines required to benefit from these teachings are not easily come by and in any event the ancient view fails to give respect to our desires as the source of all experience, not just suffering. Our desires are going to be our motivations and guides through life. In the perfection view, desires are not to be avoided. They are built-in and part of the human process. They are not dangerous of themselves; when we entertain them they affect mostly just ourselves and our handling of them is a major learning experience.

There is a point, however, at which desire or preference takes on moral clothing and morphs into a value judgment. There are ways to avoid this: For example, you can prefer vanilla without finding chocolate bad. You can choose to vote one way or the other without the necessity of demonizing the party or candidate you didn't vote for. You can always describe the way a condition makes you feel without finding it morally fit or unfit. You can want something without feeling that you need it, that you are inadequate (not good) without it.

Our culture and our language don't promote any close inspection in this area, so you are going to have to rely on your own guidance to find your way through value judgments. It all comes down to good and evil, to some universal idea of right and wrong. To the extent such an idea is guiding your judgment, to that extent it is a value

judgment.

## 5. Justifying value judgments.

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus taught on the subject of making value judgments: "Judge not." It is a very simple teaching, entirely in accord with the perfection view of the Garden Story.

You'd hardly think a teaching could get any more clear than that, but many folks, even those who feel themselves Christian, like to help Jesus get it right by tacking on a lot of exceptions. There are exceptions for really bad people and for things that hurt people and for injustice and cruelty and unfairness and . . . . Well, you know. It is another of our free will freedoms to draw our own list of exceptions. Naturally every one of these, no matter how apparently justified it may be, is a value judgment and can only be made from within the illusion of good and evil.

Most of us know somewhere inside that we are making up these exceptions; a kind of discomfort sets in when we make value judgments, and so the need for a story arises, for justification. We tend to think how wrong that judged being was, how justified we are in our condemnation. If the value in our judgment is blame, then guilt will tend to be established in justification and a story developed to support it. Also there is the very popular justification based on agreement from others. If enough people agree with a value judgment, that seems to make it okay, and if there is very widespread agreement - e.g. killing children is bad - then a value judgment can take on a patina of shared wisdom.

But however justified, any value judgment carries the consequences of one. You can examine Jesus' teaching to

your heart's content, but you will find no mention of an exception. We have looked at the entire myth of the Garden of Eden; no exception to be found there. The reason is, there is no exception. Not even a little evil can exist in paradise. It's not a rule so much as a fact. There is no infrastructure in the Garden upon which evil can find continuity.

It is nice when there occasionally appears a clear answer to anything. We have one here. There is no exception to the out-of-the-Garden consequence of value judgments.

## **6. The boomerang effect of value judgments.**

Consider the object of a value judgment. Hitler was evil. I hate anyone who is cruel to children. Terrorists are of the devil. Rutabagas tastes awful. Who takes the brunt of those judgments? Those outside wrongdoers? Not likely they'll ever even know. It is not the object of our judgment but you or I, the issuing party, who suffers. A value judgment, though aimed outward, boomerangs right back. You may hate a wrongdoer; that hate, however, is in you. Our value judgments hang around right where they are made, in us. We carry them, like baggage, until we drop them.

Paradise is not a values-oriented kind of place. We can embrace good and combat evil and that is a lovely thing to do. But it is not a thing that can be done in paradise. Evil doesn't exist there; there's nothing to fight. So we have to leave to do it.

## **7. The antidote to value judgments – forgiveness.**

How we release value judgments is through forgiveness. Forgiveness negates the charge, the value we

have attributed, and neutralizes it. This is one of Jesus central teachings: "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who have trespassed against us." We are forgiven as we forgive. It is automatic.

What is there to forgive? It is not really the object of the judgment who, as we have seen, is usually oblivious to the drama. It is the judgment itself. We create it and it is ours to release. We do that by forgiveness, letting go of our justifications and stories, and cutting our ties with the judgment we have made. Forgiveness requires only our action.

Our dictionary defines "forgive" as follows: To grant pardon for or remission of (something); cease to demand the penalty for. 2. To grant freedom from penalty to (someone). 3. To cease to blame or feel resentment against. 4. To remit, as a debt.

This is all that is needed to terminate a value judgment and so to terminate its effects upon its creator. The consent of the judged person is often irrelevant and never necessary. If you have hurt someone you may well have your own ideas about what will be necessary for you to make amends for that hurt. But as for your value judgment, it is made by you and can be unmade by you through forgiveness. No one else has a vote on that.

This is not to be glib. Forgiveness sometimes requires time and some deep letting go within. So can breaking the habit of judging. We can become very attached to our value judgments. Most modern lives are awash in judgment, our institutions positively revel in it, our media pose everything as a "fight" or "battle" – even recovering from disease, a time when when we are primarily lying down. The cultural investment in the reality of good and evil is pervasive. Forgiveness is neither taught widely nor

conspicuously rewarded.

Still, the message of the perfection view on this is that forgiveness is entirely within your power. No one can take that power from you. And what this means is that we have all had the keys to paradise the whole time. That is the perfection view.

## **8. The perfection of value judgments.**

The power to make value judgments is a gift; they are our key to the exciting world of good and evil; they are how we stay out of paradise. They make up part of the private worlds we create out of our lives.

There is no moral imperative to stop making value judgments or for that matter to return to paradise. Many of us may not be ready to leave all our value judgments behind, may indeed not want to. We are all on self-guided trips and we don't have to return to paradise until we feel ourselves ready to do so. Paradise is not going anywhere.

Isn't that just perfect?

# THE WAY OF PERFECTION

## Conclusion

### FINDING PERFECTION

A substantial part of the Way of Perfection has been devoted to the trouble we encounter in our lives. This is because trouble has a way of becoming a priority and because the view from perfection offers us the clarity to understand it and so master it.

Trouble, however, is a tiny part of perfection and we'd like here to return to the larger picture, the picture of a perfection that is intrinsic and inviolate. We may forget it, deny it, ridicule it or ignore it, but it remains as it has always been.

It is a part of perfection that we are given the opportunity to ignore it, to leave it behind in our minds, and venture out into the amazing experiences that await us in the realm of good and evil. It is also part of perfection that we can return to it when we are ready.

Paradise, where un-judged perfection reigns, awaits us when we free ourselves of our value judgments, which cannot exist there.

This leads us to a simple and straightforward conclusion: We are, each of us, a mere step away from paradise. We do not have to die or go anywhere. Paradise is a state that exists eternally within us.

If there is a "sin" that gets us out of paradise, it is the act of finding sin. The Garden Story is clear about it: the only thing that takes us out of paradise is to divide our

world into good and evil, to judge it, to find sin in it. This is something entirely within our discretion.

Paradise is our natural home. We leave it voluntarily and return the same way. Though some of us forget that we are volunteers, yet we all awaken when we have completed our journey. For this reason, the view from perfection is that human existence is perfect.

We invite you to consider this amazing perfection possibility: that underlying all the turbulence we see in the body politic and even in our own bodies, there lies, always, this incorruptible perfection that is the actual nature of creation. Is it true?

You might like to check this perfection business out for yourself. Is it true? Keep asking. Keep looking. There is no point in asking anyone outside; you will want to ask yourself. Keep asking; keep taking no for an answer and yet remain open. Always the perfection has been hidden beneath sensation that draws our attention away from it. Keep looking. You don't have to "believe" it. Be as skeptical as you like. Just start letting some part of yourself suspend all judgment and look for perfection, to note it when you see it. We call it "practicing perfection." See for yourself if the parts of your inner world slowly rearrange themselves when viewed this way; watch the wholeness and interconnectedness of the outer world come into focus.

Then observe how things look when you see them perfectly. They do work, for one thing. Together with all other things, they make up this creation, and they all operate together. That they sometimes do so violently, thuggishly, gorgeously, incredibly and all the other ways they do so is true. We observe them without judging them. We do everything we do without putting any value of good and evil in our decisions.

And with this point of view, the world straightens out for us. Being non-judging allows us to see clearly, without fear. Everything falls into place. The walls of the illusions become transparent.

If you are drawn to the practice of perfection, just inquire within yourself. The perfection view offers you the possibility that your own personal paradise is within you, at your core. It may be possible that we don't have to strive for paradise but merely to forgive, and that our way to this truth is blocked only by our own value judgments over which we retain full control.

No one can ever talk you into this view of perfection, and the Way of Perfection is by no means trying to do that. But it does invite you to check it out for yourself, to practice perfection in your own life.

Your comments and insights are welcome. Visit us at [thewayofperfection.org](http://thewayofperfection.org).

Thank you.