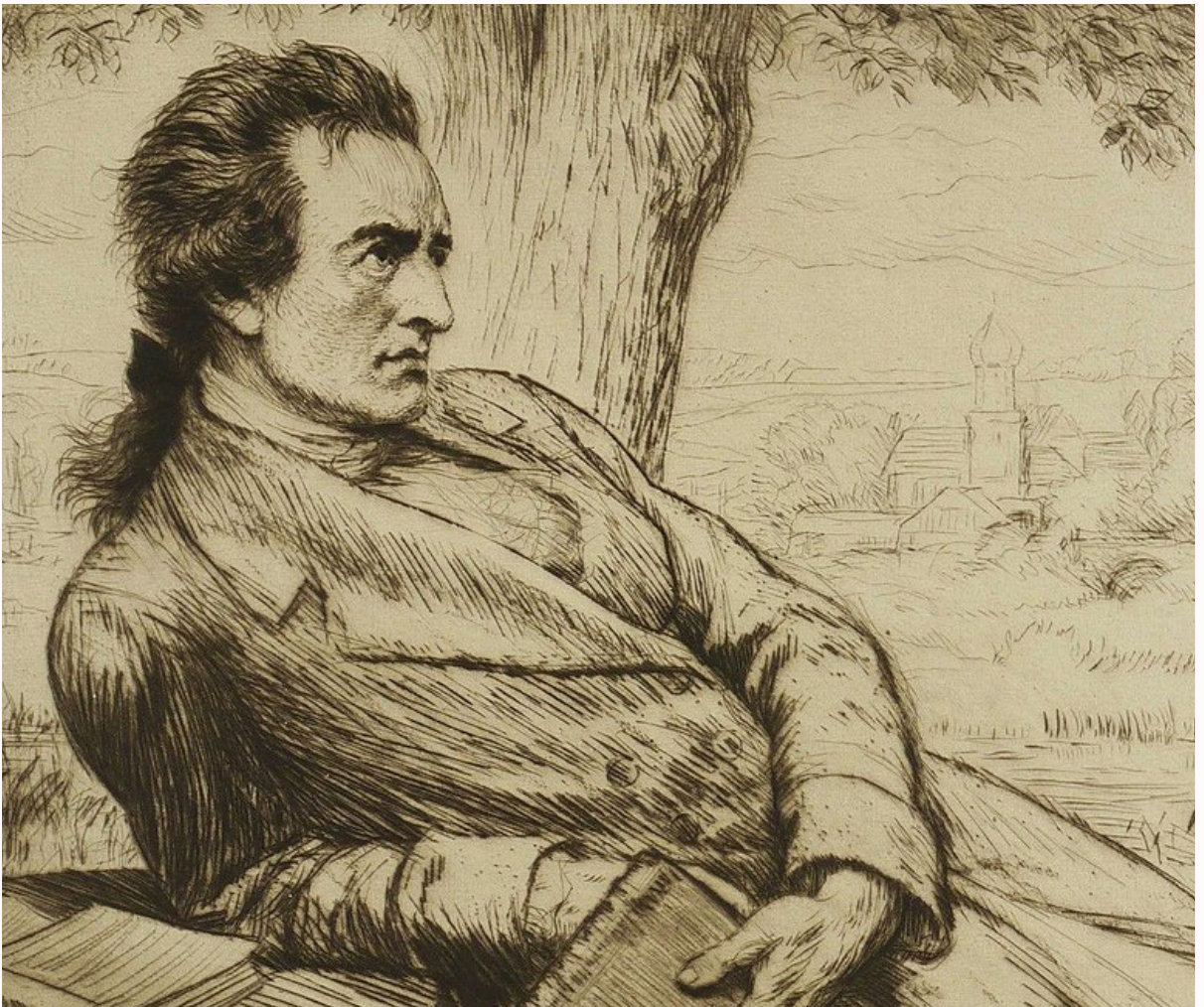


The Blank Stare of the Idiot

“None are more hopelessly enslaved than those who falsely believe they are free.” These words of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe are nearly two-hundred years old, but are perhaps more pertinent today in our time than in his.





Many believe we live in freedom simply because society has not morphed into a dystopian hell like the one depicted in George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty Four*. Slavery, most people believe, would be overt in nature, it would be clear to see, and all would recognise it. But is this really the case?

Or could it be that technology, smart phones, social media and other gratifying diversions have created a populace too distracted to notice the chains which bind them? And that it is not Big Brother or some other tyrannical figure who has enforced these chains but ourselves?

More than at any point in the history of civilization, the average individual living in the West today is free from the daily struggle for survival. But with this newfound freedom we have sought out a new master, and so we are confronted with crucial questions: who or what are we enslaved to? And how do we reclaim our freedom?

Section 1:



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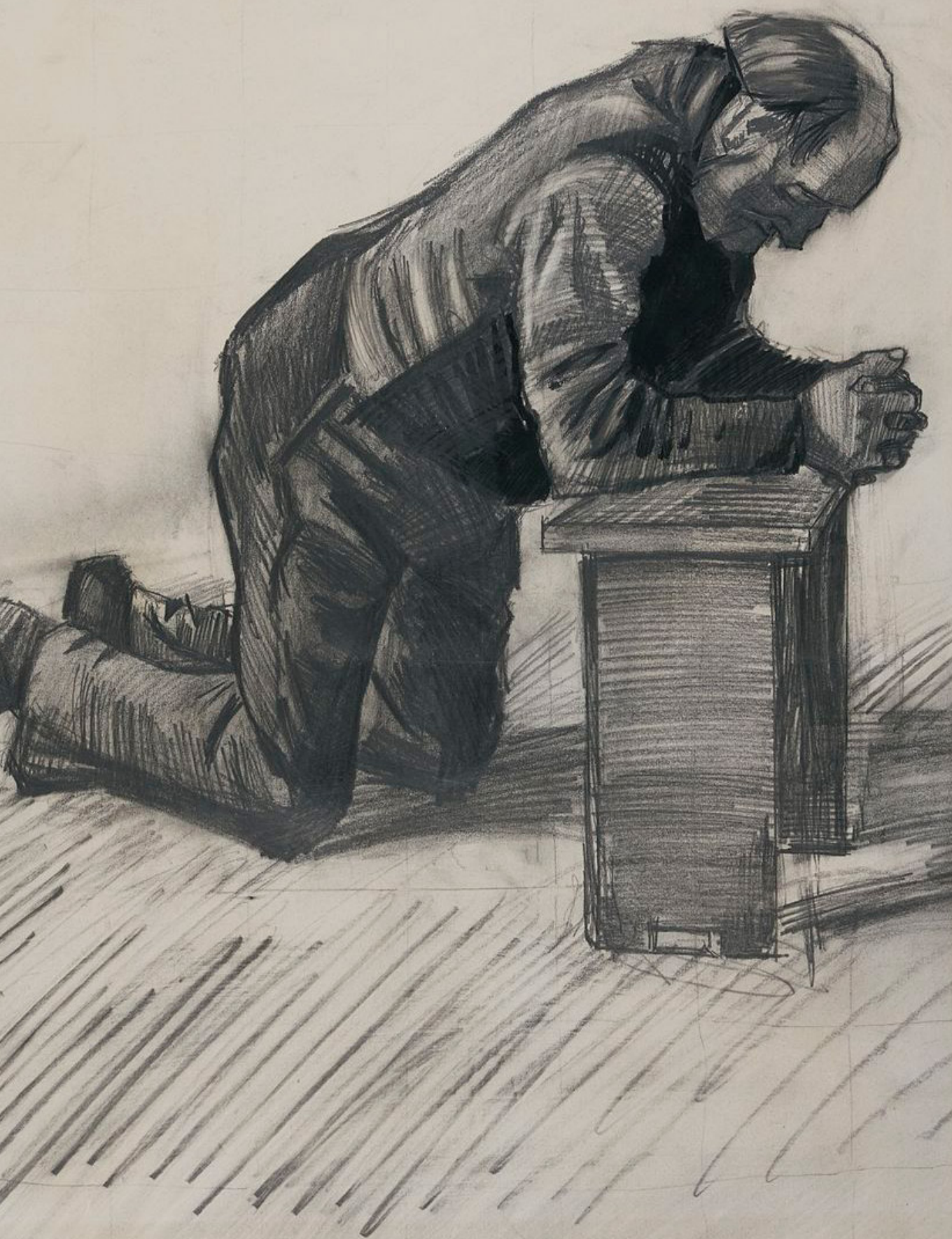
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The origins of this enslavement process can be traced back to the rise of atheism and the decline of Christianity in the West. The so-called, “Death of God”, coined by Friedrich Nietzsche. Before getting into this though, I feel it is appropriate, and necessary to speak of God’s life. For mankind’s Christian related issues began long before religion lost its all consuming influence on the lives of its believers.







The religious nature follows the path of self-denial, using solitude, fasting and sexual abstinence. Take a look at the idol of the saint, who was, even by kings and rulers, respected. In the saint we see the display of the strongest will power, so strong it can carry out the greatest self-denial ever seen. This is the quintessential Christian doctrine; to deny oneself, to deny life itself.

When believers honoured saints they honoured something in themselves, the strength of will to deny temptation in pursuit of a place in heaven.

But, was this self-denial a choice?
Or was it a post-rationalisation
made to justify one's circumstances
for life? The values that had
represented the noble class,
which finds its origins in cultures
like Ancient Greece, such as
exceptional character, boldness,
health and pride are inverted by
the priests; meekness, the value
of suffering, humility, these are
new moral codes.

Their moral laws will (they hope)
protect them, as well as justify them
and the way they live. They refuse
to admit to desiring what one
cannot obtain. Better to reject it as
worthless. "No" is their creative act.

“Boldness is really
arrogance, pride
is really self love.
Only the poor, the
powerless, are good;
only the suffering,
sick and ugly, are
truly blessed. But you,
noble and mighty ones
of the earth will be,
to all eternity, the evil,
the cruel, the godless,
and thus the cursed
and damned!”

- Friedrich Nietzsche



Though no one can live thinking they are so secretly hateful, so they invent a rationalization. The rationale tells them they are the moral BECAUSE they are weak, humble and passive. Patience is a virtue because they have to wait a long time to get what they want. Obedience is a virtue, they can't act of their own will, they have to obey, so they make it a virtue. They cannot get the sex they desire so chastity is a virtue. Humility is a virtue, because they have nothing to be proud of. The opposite of these is evil; aggressiveness, pride, independance, being physically and materially successful.

The code of ethics employed by the Christian church repressed self-realisation by spreading the idea that to seek autonomy and act in the service of one's self-interest is a sin, while to sacrifice oneself and admit dependence upon God the highest good. As so, the desires for sex, pride and power were branded as evil elements to be dociled and eradicated. The individual was taught by Christian minds not to overcome himself, but to deny himself, and to cap his potential for the sake of his soul. Unable to achieve what they desire in life they claim, "For us, gratification is deferred until heaven."

Life for the Christian was, ironically, reserved until death.

Section 2:

An aerial photograph showing a large-scale forest fire. Thick, dark smoke billows upwards from the ground, creating a dramatic contrast with the bright sky. The smoke forms a large, irregular plume that spreads across the upper half of the image. The ground below is a dense forest, with some areas appearing charred and others still green. The overall scene is one of intense natural power and environmental impact.

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The decline of religion, faiths, beliefs and myths that began in the late eighteenth century has ushered the world into a period of nihilism in which it remains to this day. Our advancements in science and technology cannot make up for this lack of myth which has made it harder to face up to our existential crisis and increased our inclination for psychological suffering.



For millennia it was the role of religion and its symbols to give meaning and a sense of purpose to the life of man. When a person came to themselves in their time of reflection and solitude and posed the question, “What is my purpose? What am I here for?”. Their answer came almost as an instinctual reaction, “I am here to serve God on earth. To follow his teachings, to treat others well and to not indulge into the passions that lust and gluttony so tempt me. If I can do this, one day I will be rewarded in heaven.”

This belief endowed life with a perspective that went far beyond a person's limited existence. But, as society advanced and intelligence rose we began to ask ourselves, why should we believe in something that considered objectively, through the lens of our more enlightened scientific minds, has no basis in reality? We have no proof, and so is it possible a deity who preaches of the essential values of truth is the greatest of all lies?



*El sueño
de la razón
produce
monstruos.*



But if the ideas on the origins of morality discussed in the first section are correct - if moral ideas are the simple result of human self-interest and the evolutionary urge to survive - then what happens when the rationale behind these morals dies?

If there is no God then why put up with suffering? Why be patient? Why show pity? Why deny yourself of life's pleasures? The answer is you don't deny yourself of pleasure, why should you? This nihilism which results in the treatment of pleasant distraction to ease any psychological discomfort, brings a feeling of general malaise.

Religion led people to drastically underestimate their own potential for greatness. In doing so, they incapacitate the heroic impulse to will ambitious goals and eradicate the desires that create clefts, which differentiate the great type of human beings from the average. But now this denial which halts the cultivation of character is coupled with a lack of purpose.

When a society loses its myth,
the members of that society do
not lose their need for a purposeful
and meaningful life that myth
once provided. Therefore we find
ourselves in a perilous position.
For without a belief to help us
derive a meaningful life and unite
the culture in which we live,
people will latch onto new false
faiths that provide no improvement,
and possibly deteriorate us
even further, like capitalist and
consumer culture, and the worship
of idols which lack much virtue.





For fame, in modern society,
is held primarily by celebrities
and politicians, two categories
of individuals for whom the
word heroic is rarely associated.



And so, if as the Ancient Greeks
believed, a civilization are known
by the idols they worship, then it
is safe to say the spirit of heroism
has withered and died from the
modern world.

This consumer-centered culture that has emerged to create. Most people have the power to be creative at an incomprehensible level... but many people - pursue the passing pleasures and satisfactions of the moment. Indeed, many people will account their lives to be well lived with minimal discomfort and possess the latest material contentment above all! This is one of the most



merged has destroyed the will
creative, and some hold it to an
probably most - are content with
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to be successful if they get get by
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The majority pass their time, day after day, in idle, passive activities, just looking at things - television, games, phones, whatever... or they spend their days talking, mostly about nothing of interest, gossiping about others, of the weather, of things forgotten in the same breath as they are mentioned. They have no vision for themselves beyond getting through another day doing more or less what they did yesterday, never having had a profound or even original thought. This is what is common, typical, usual, indeed normal. Relatively few people rise above living in this grot, the world forgetting, by the world forgot.







Religion, Karl Marx declared, is the opium of the people; however in our present social order this situation has reversed, opium, or rather these pleasurable distractions, are the people's religion. The availability of smartphones amongst other devices and inventions provide senseless and novel amusements which consume the attention of most people, drowning the mind in a sea of irrelevance. The reality is that a distracted population simply lacks the mental resources to resist their enslavement to comfort, consumption and desire. In the end people will lay their freedom at their feet, and say "Make us your slaves, but feed us."
(Fyodor Dostoevsky)

Human beings need a certain amount of challenge, of purpose, to stop them from staring into the blank stare and blank consciousness of the idiot.

Therefore if we are spending three hours a day on our smartphones, which is the low end estimation for adults, we must raise the question to ourselves, “Is the convenience and contentment these activities provide worth its cost?” For even if our lack of purpose does not plant within us the seeds of nihilism and depression, then it lowers our possibilities of ever being able to attain the self-love that sits alongside genuine pride and accomplishment.

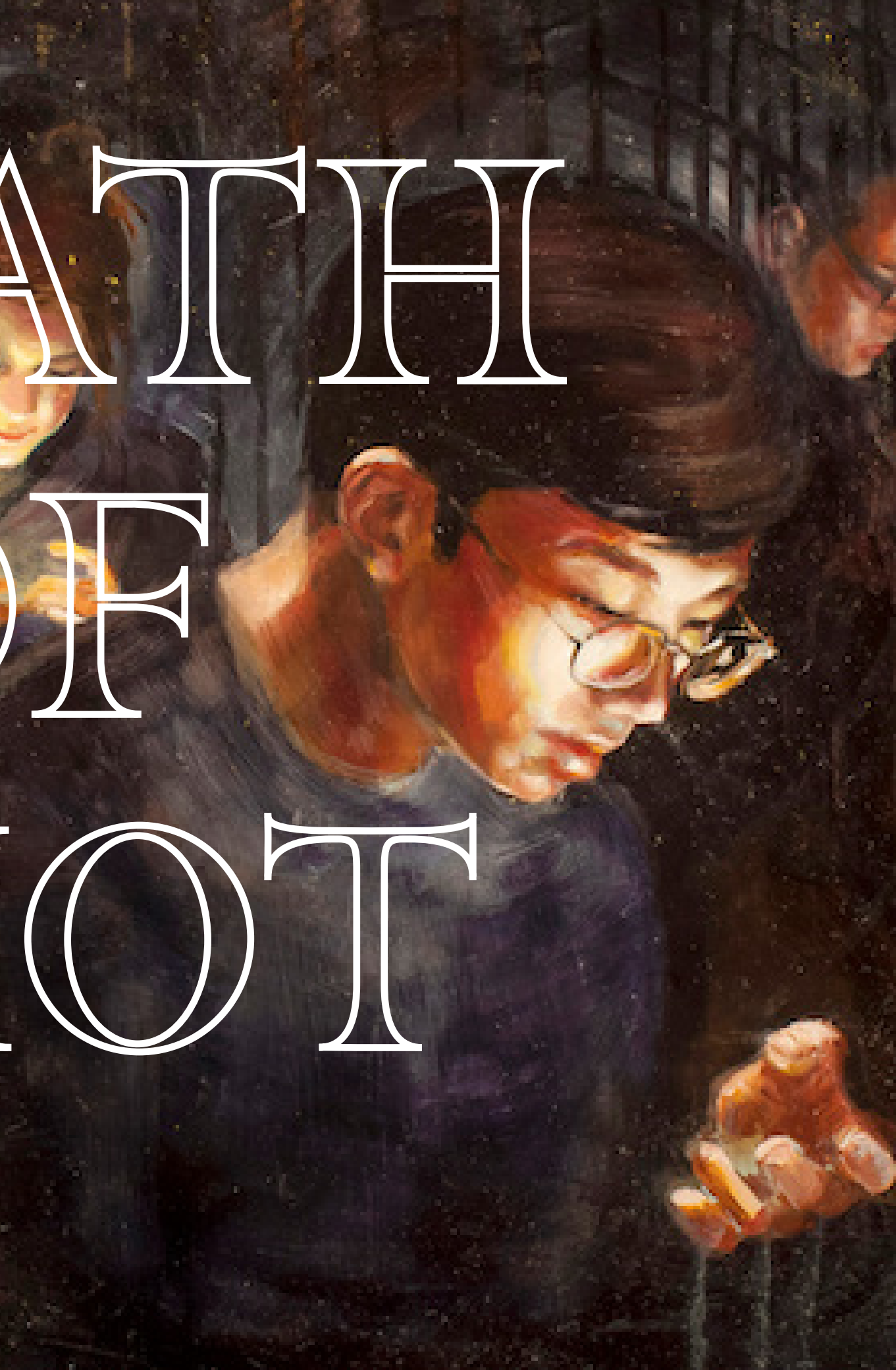
Section 3:



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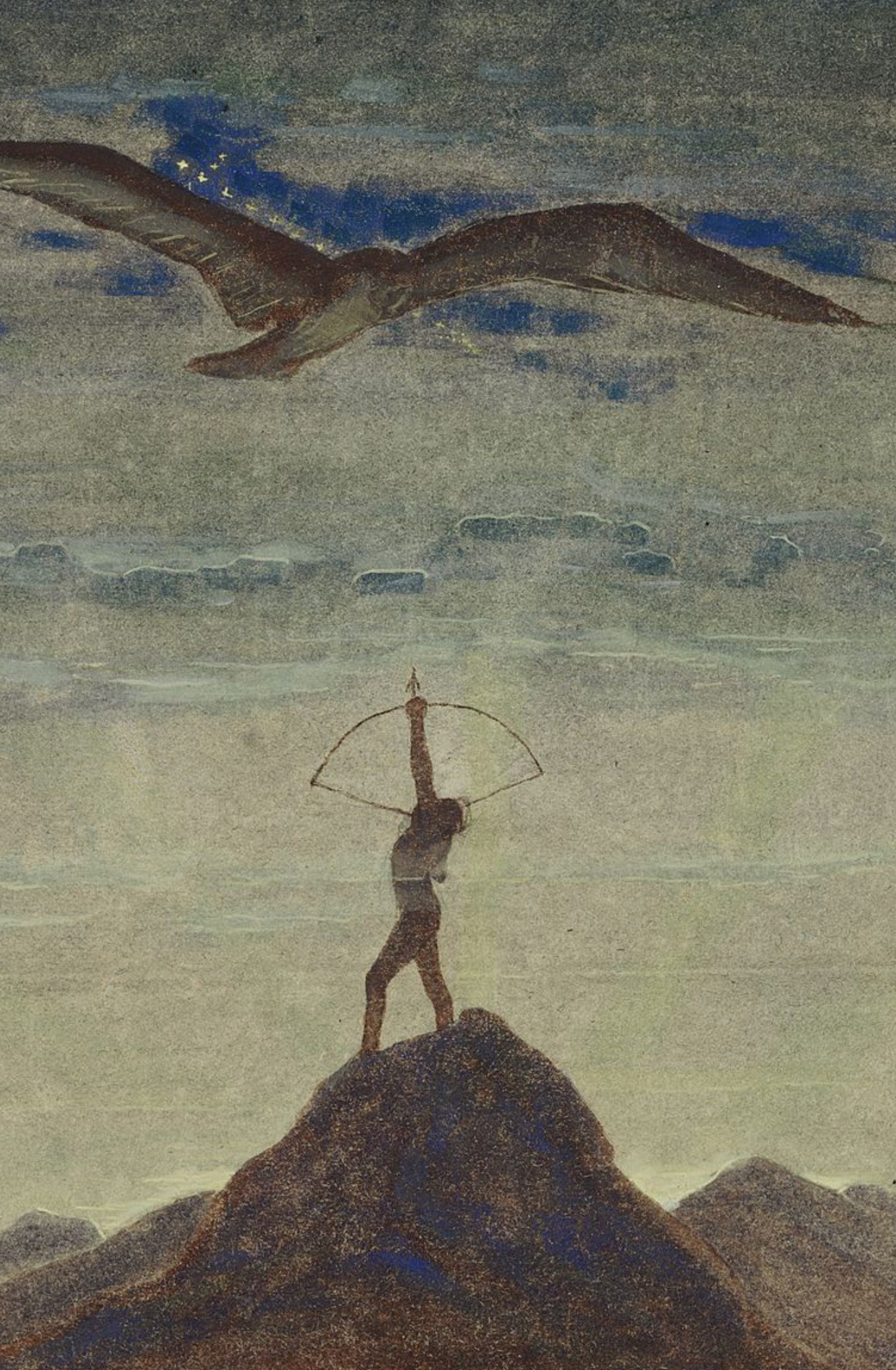


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There is a silver lining however, if we have enough time to stare at our screens for hours a day then we also have time to engage in activities that can challenge and enrich us, or devote ourselves to mastery of a specific field.

We can strive to spend the majority of our free time creating, exploring, learning, doing - challenging our capacities and improving our talents. While this option entails perseverance, struggle, and the sacrifice of short-term pleasures and comfort, the pay off - mental health and personal growth - is worth the effort. The time we can claim back from these distracting activities can result in a life we can truly be proud of.





It is now time for the individual to realize himself as the creator of these values, and thus capable of forging his own meaning and embodying his own justification, rather than remaining dependent on external institutions and creeds.

Once we said “God” when we gazed upon distant seas; but now we will learn to say “Superman”. Discard with the teachings of the church! Discard with the values of capitalism! Discard with the comforts of consumerism!



Instead create a new meaning of the earth; one that embraces the individual's desire to actualize and assert himself for the sake of self-overcoming. This new meaning, to be the Superman.



While we may be forced to accept the mythless condition into which we were born, it does not mean that we must endure a meaningless existence as a result. The need to create our own sense of meaning in our own small portion in an otherwise meaningless world is why our time, in addition to being a daunting one, can also be viewed as the age of the hero.

After all what is more heroic and brave than standing up to nihilism itself? To not return to the safety of religion or the contentment that dims the mind, to exist in a meaningless world and rise each morning to create meaning in the small portion in which you can. As Nietzsche says, “To live is to suffer, to survive is to find meaning in the suffering.”

Rather than being overcome and succumbing to the inner chaos which attacks those disconnected from an effective myth, the hero stands up to this mighty beast and discovers his or her own solutions to the existential burdens of our time. The brave few who take on this challenge return themselves to the realm of myth. In striving to impose order in their own small corner of the world, they have chosen the heroic path that is represented, by Carl Jung, as the fight with the dragon.





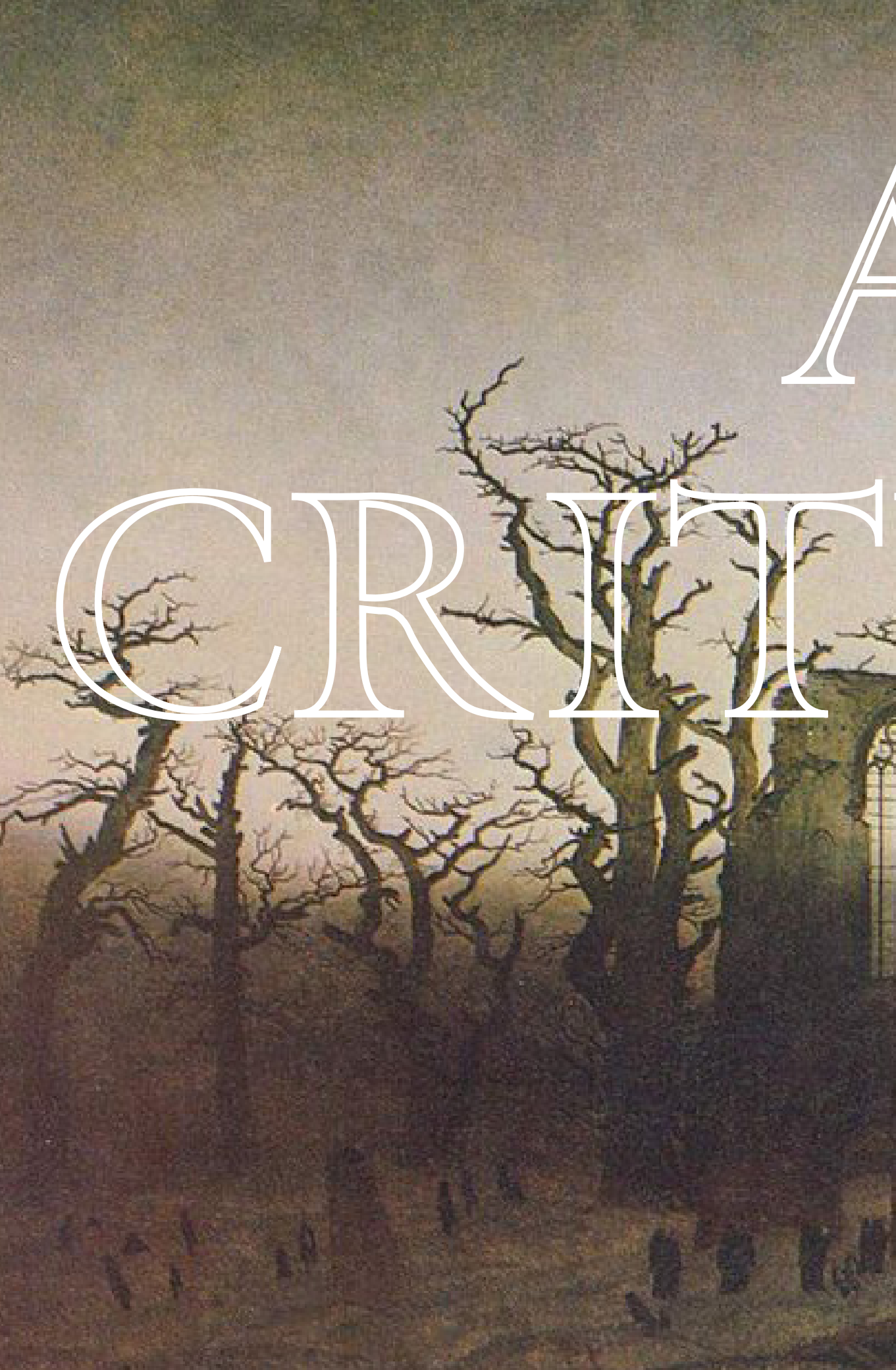


“Only one who has risked the fight with the dragon and is not overcome by it wins the hoard, the “treasure hard to attain”. He alone has a genuine claim to self-confidence, for he has faced the dark ground of his self and thereby has gained himself. This experience gives some faith and trust in the ability of the self to sustain him, for everything that menaced him from inside he has made his own. He has acquired the right to believe that he will be able to overcome all future threats by the same means. He has arrived at an inner certainty which makes him capable of self-reliance.”

- Carl Gustav Jung

The free spirits among us will feel joy at this news, we can finally break free from our chains to the couch cushion. At last the horizon seems to us free, at last our ships can put out again, set a sail atop the sea of irrelevance and remain dry; no matter what the danger; every daring venture of advancement is again permitted; the sea, our sea again is there open before us; perhaps there has never been such an open sea. . .

Section 4:



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To increase awareness of a life not lived, to promote deep thought, and to provoke action, these are the aims of this critique on cultural capitalism that has swept across the West like a plague.

The impulse to alleviate any silent moment in which one may be forced to think by whipping out a smart phone or sinking into the couch to binge watch a series on Netflix is seen as the social norm. Unlike an addiction to alcohol, cigarettes, or heroin, an addiction to these gratifying, momentary, novice, pleasures is not met with disapproval.



I am not in any way trying to make the claim that the inability to wait at a bus stop, sit in the passenger seat of a car or go to the toilet without feeling the urge to tap away on a smartphone is on the same level as heroin addiction. But we don't know where this will lead. What will the childhood of someone living in the 22nd century consist of?





The possibility of living in an Aldous Huxley Brave New World-esque society hardly seems as far fetched as when it was conceived. A population coerced into submission and uniformity not by threats and violence, but by endless pleasure.



So I opt to make a pre-emptive strike, just as we would not wish the disease of alcoholism on our worst enemy, neither should we wish for those we care for to be enamoured with there little doses of pleasure that stunt personal growth.

This does not mean every single person is to be scrutinised for indulging in some of life's pleasures, for I am no priest. Just as someone is well within their rights to drink alcohol they are free to amuse themselves with these pleasures, but also like alcohol, they should do so responsibly, and should not do so to the detriment of their cultivation of character.



My critique is hyperbolic, I am aware, but I fear if I practice a less provocative and offensive approach I risk not being heard at all, so I will shout! Better to get an angry, disagreeable response. Better people say “Why are you being such a dick?” or “Why can’t you let people just chill and relax without guilting them?” Than a pleasant, “That’s nice” Because what is interesting about that?



So, as the subject of my critique, I have identified the socially accepted “Idiot”, one who, instead of focusing on ways to enhance the grandeur of man, is concerned solely with using science and technology to enhance the pleasure and comfort of man. If asked “What is love? What is creation? What is longing? What is a star?”, the Idiot would blink in dumbfounded amusement. The Idiot exists as part of a herd with no herdsman, where everyone wants the same thing, and everybody is the same: whoever thinks otherwise goes voluntarily into the madhouse.



By stepping into the shoes of the Idiot I have fulfilled the role of a lifetime. For forty hours across five days, 5p.m. - 1a.m. Monday to Friday I sat down and dressed, ate, and consumed television like somebody who has no aspiration of achieving, learning or doing more than they did yesterday.

I then streamed my performance on Twitch, I included a manifesto and a reading list of what had led me to this point, as well as what I hope to read in the near future. Critiquing the concept of Twitch, a platform which primarily consists of viewers watching somebody else play videogames, through Twitch is something I found interesting.



I included quotes projected on a wall behind me from great thinkers, characters, leaders and philosophers which I came across in my research. Such as Goethe, Nietzsche, Carlyle, Spengler, Homer, Caesar, Orwell, Huxley and other figures.



To think your purpose in life is to be trained to have a job and pay taxes is selling yourself short. Alright that's a hell of a lot better than being unemployed and covered in junk food while you're snacking away and playing video games in the basement, but it's hardly a triumphant call to being in the world, and that's exactly what we should be calling for.

