

April 2021

VOLUME XII, ISSUE 4

PEGASUS

A NEWSLETTER FOR THE CAUX ROUND TABLE FOR MORAL CAPITALISM
NETWORK LOOKING AT BUSINESS ABOVE THE CLUTTER AND CONFETTI



Pegasus

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Introduction

More and more, I suggest discussions of a “new” capitalism - a moral capitalism, an inclusive capitalism, a common good capitalism, an idealistic capitalism, where private investment and consumption serves both individual and public preferences – is demanding that we think of systems, not just of transactions.

Systems have design, so design thinking becomes foundational. Systems can degrade and lose their value. Systems require interconnections, reciprocities and win/win checks and balances. Systems are alive with energies.

A system property is entropy – how much a system uses its energies well and constructively to produce benefits or disperses its energies chaotically.

I submitted to our network recently a concept paper on entropy as reflecting ethics. My point was that in human systems, ethics directs energies towards lower entropy and more valuable achievement. Bad ethics or a lack of ethics conditions the system to function with high entropy or more chaos and less beneficial achievement.

I received from many readers agreement with this premise, for which I am grateful. Thus, we are including it in this issue of *Pegasus*.

Our staff then discussed further implications of entropy analysis for moral capitalism. Two short essays by Rich Broderick and Michael Hartonian are also included in this issue.

Patrick Rhone on our staff commented that a driver of entropy in human systems is very personal. It is the individual’s sense of agency within the core self-system of the personality. Where the person identifies with agency power, entropy decreases. Correspondingly, where a person does not feel ownership of personal agency to change circumstances, that person’s values, emotions and behaviors contribute to high entropy – more random dispersal of energies, both from the person and from others who are in relationship with the person.

Patrick further proposed that one’s existential suppositions condition awareness of personal agency. Worry that “this’ is all that I am and that “this” is all there is and can ever be brings on depression and isolation of the self-system from the fullness of life. Anxiety and angst, the sense that life is absurd, articulated by Existentialists such as Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre, along with resentments and fear, degrade any person’s sense of agency. Such interior unease and stress increase entropy in the self-system. Then, the more entropic individuals through more chaotic interventions with others add to the entropy of the larger society.

Patrick’s suggested response was to learn from the teachings of the Stoics, the Taoists and from Buddhist mindfulness.

Rich, then, wondered if the current American fixation on “racism” and “inclusion and diversity” were not also tied to entropy. If the larger social system won’t or can’t validate

your sense of purpose, if you perceive that it doesn't care about you, but only for "winners," that you are just "cannon fodder" for the high and the mighty, then you will experience higher entropy within your psycho-somatic life form and your life will experience more chaotic diffusion of your energies physically, mentally, emotionally and in your relationships.

Our staff discussion prompted me to consider other situations where something warps systemic entropy into greater randomness with consequent loss of good outcomes or something else works to reduce entropy.

I thought of racism as isolating self-systems and sub-cultures increasing entropy and multiculturalism as reducing entropy. The personal entitlements provided by the welfare state create self-absorption, dependency and a consequent loss of agency, contributing to higher entropy in self-systems and less overall work in the society. Third, anti-monopoly laws might have the function of lowering entropy. They prevent concentration of market power, concentrations which would lead to dominant firms isolating themselves from market forces and in so doing, increasing entropy. I would postulate that, right now, the monopolistic positions of Facebook and Twitter are contributing to more chaos in American culture and politics.

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An Important Advantage of Ethics: Optimizing Entropy in the Self-System

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When there is talk of ethics or morality, these days, many quickly turn their attention elsewhere. They might like virtue signaling, but thinking more deeply about ethics seems out of fashion. In an era of social media, we easily take offense as to whether we are right or wrong. We easily resent others imposing on us what is right and wrong to them or what might give advantage to their religion or their righteousness. We might seek to protect our personal space in order to be practical, to take care of our needs or to seize promising opportunities. We just might not want to give others power over our choice of values. We might be cautious in imposing our judgments on others or just want to avoid the possible unpleasantness of arguments over values and tastes.

But what if we could talk about ethics and morals – what is right to do – based not on speculations about ideas and ideals, not on rhetoric and sophistry, but rather on **science**, which is credited with being objective, universal and “value free?” That might be more convincing and more conducive to thinking of how our actions will impact others and ourselves in the future.

Science, as we simplistically think of it, embraces laws of nature. That which is and which we can't change, even if we wish to; something permanent about living, like gravity or our need to breathe.

One relevant kind of natural law would be a universal anthropology – the same biology for every human person, such as an innate emotional need for sociability and dependency on others for personal identity and well-being.

A second natural law applicable to our species is the Second Law of Thermodynamics from physics. Energy cannot be created or destroyed, but it can change from more useful forms into less useful forms.

The Second Law applies to systems of energy. Humans, too, are systems of energy, biological systems and more. We systematize our emotional orientations, our thoughts, our use of language and our personal structures. The physical human person is something of an energy field with circulation of blood and a dynamic nervous system. We each also possess energy fields in the neurons and synapses of our brains, in neuro-transmitters and endocrines, all of which support our being conscious, of having a conscience, a psychic life, thoughts and emotions and interacting psycho-somatically with our heart, stomach, nervous system and other internal organs.

We are, therefore, also subject to the Second Law.

The human person is also the possessor of ethics in using our energies to do this or do that. We like to structure our use of life forces, to systematize them for coherence as an individual self. We can, thus, presume an interdependency between ethics and the properties of the self-system, the arrangement of inter-related components linked with one another and with various flows of energy. This interdependency of ethics and our self-system then links ethics to entropy.

The Second Law holds that there are consequences when energy systems self-isolate and close in on themselves. Isolated systems are subject to entropy, a measure of how much the energy of a system is not put into constructive work. High entropy means high disorder and less work. Low entropy is less disorder and more work. For individuals, having high entropy means more disordered living and, conversely, having low entropy means living more purposefully and so with more success in engaging with the world around us.

I am of the tentative opinion that our lives, including our decision-making around ethical considerations, cannot escape a natural law such as the Second Law of Thermodynamics. But one could still benefit from a less compelling application of the law of entropy to our way of being in the world by using the Second Law of Thermodynamics as a metaphor for how we do and should use our various energy fields, from our nervous system to our sense of humor.

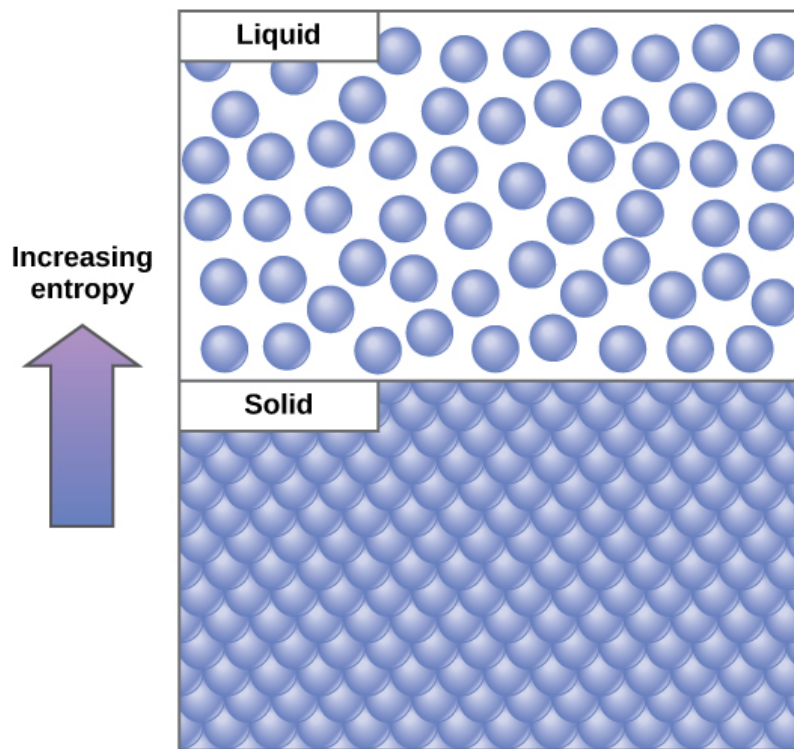
Entropy is a measure of randomness: the less random the energy, the more focused, the more structured, the more coherent is its effect; the more random the energy, the more chaotic, fragmented, discordant, confusing, at cross-purposes, is the system housing such potential for action.

To better understand entropy, think of a child's bedroom. If no work were put into it, the room would quickly become messy. It would exist in a very disordered state, one of high entropy.

Entropy is a measure of randomness or disorder in a system. Gases have higher entropy than liquids and liquids have higher entropy than solids.

An important concept in physical systems is disorder (also known as randomness). The more energy that is lost by a system to its surroundings, the less ordered and more random the system is. Scientists define the measure of randomness or disorder within a system as entropy. High entropy means high disorder and low energy. To better understand entropy, remember that it requires energy to maintain structure. For example, think about an ice cube. It is made of water molecules bound together in an orderly lattice. This arrangement takes energy to maintain. When the ice cube melts and becomes water, its molecules are more disordered, in a random arrangement, as opposed to a structure. Overall, there is less energy in the system inside the molecular bonds. Therefore, water can be said to have greater entropy than ice.

This holds true for solids, liquids and gases in general. Solids have the highest internal energy holding them together and therefore, the lowest entropy. Liquids are more disordered and it takes less energy to hold them together. Therefore, they are higher in entropy than solids, but lower than gases, which are so disordered that they have the highest entropy and lowest amount of energy spent holding them together.



In more human terms, randomness indicates a lack of purpose, a void where there could be meaning. Energy, as a natural force, flows through the universe without any moral agenda. As a coronavirus doesn't make a knowing choice as to who to infect, as a hurricane has no reason to pick this tree or that to blow down, the universe is morally neutral as to its outcomes.

The sense of life's essential meaninglessness was pretty well put by Shakespeare:

Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow,
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,
To the last syllable of recorded time;
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player,
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
And then is heard no more. It is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing.

The randomness of high entropy in persons expresses itself as Shakespeare's "sound and fury."

Simply put, isolated systems lose the ability to generate constructive work. Entropy demands that more and more of their energy is diverted away from work to random or chaotic bursts. Closed systems subside into equilibrium, with low useful energy and high chaotic energy.

Open systems, on the other hand, are linked to larger systems and so are positioned to import energy and focus it on work, minimizing randomness.

All physical systems can be thought of in this way. Living things are highly ordered, requiring constant energy input to maintain themselves in a state of low entropy.

However, these local reductions in entropy can occur only with an expenditure of energy, where some of that energy is converted into heat or other non-usable forms. The net effect of the original process (local decrease in entropy) and the energy transfer (increase in entropy of surroundings) is an overall increase in the entropy of the universe. The high degree of organization of living things is maintained by a constant input of energy and is offset by an increase in the entropy of the surroundings.

As living systems take in energy-storing molecules and transform them through chemical reactions, they lose some amount of usable energy in the process because no reaction is completely efficient. They also produce waste and by-products that are not useful energy sources. This process increases the entropy of the system's surroundings. As we import and process impressions and other stimuli from our environment, we react with them as well, using internal energies responding and adjusting to what has been received. Some of our responses and adjustments can be dysfunctional, producing a kind of waste in energy use and leaving by-products in our emotions and thoughts, which might keep us from thinking straight, sleeping restfully or which would trigger flight or fight anxieties or otherwise sabotage our relationships with others.

Since all energy transfers result in the loss of some usable energy, the Second Law of Thermodynamics states that every energy transfer or transformation increases the entropy of the universe. Even though living things are highly ordered and maintain a state of low entropy, the entropy of the universe, in total, is constantly increasing due to the loss of usable energy with each energy transfer that occurs. Essentially, living things are in a continuous uphill battle against this constant increase in universal entropy.

The Second Law of Thermodynamics holds that if a system, such as our individual self-system, closes itself down, isolates itself or becomes introverted and withdrawn, it will reduce its capacity for work and increase the energy it devotes to chaos.

An isolated system is one that cannot exchange either matter or energy with its surroundings. A perfect, isolated system is hard to come by, but an insulated drink cooler with a lid is conceptually similar to a true isolated system. The items inside can exchange energy with each other, which is why the drinks get cold and the ice melts a little, but they exchange very little energy (heat) with the outside environment.

The Second Law of Thermodynamics states that the entropy of isolated systems left to spontaneous evolution cannot decrease with time, as they always arrive at a state of thermodynamic equilibrium, where the entropy (randomness) is highest and structured outcomes.

Isolated systems live by the maximum entropy production principle. It states that a system in non-equilibrium evolves such as to maximize its entropy production.

The Second Law of Thermodynamics also states that when a body of material starts from an equilibrium state in which portions of it are held at different states by more or less permeable or impermeable partitions and a thermodynamic operation removes or makes the partitions more permeable and it is isolated, then it spontaneously reaches its own new state of internal thermodynamic equilibrium and this is accompanied by an increase in the sum of the entropies of the portions.

Part of our personal structure is a receptivity to stimuli – energy flows – from our environment. We are porous in many ways, absorbing energy flows and letting energy flow from us to the outside through our actions and expressions of self. Only a membrane separates us from what is around us.

We can close down to the outside world, limiting the flow of external energies through our containing membrane into our person. We can also close down our internal systems inside our containing membrane as a result of our psycho-social dispositions to drive us towards higher randomness and smaller purposeful emotional and mental states.

When a self-system closes in on itself and moves towards isolation, its entropy increases. Part of the diffusion of the self's internal energies in the state of isolation would go towards maintenance of the system's boundary with its external environment. Another form of diffusion might well be more intense use of some internal energy in interpersonal power dynamics involving other individuals and social forces.

The function of ethics and morality is to keep our self-system open and minimize the chaos in our lives (destabilizations, loss of constructive purpose and self-control) arising from internal intellectual and emotional chaos - neuroses and psychoses – and from chaotic interactions with our environment.

The randomness in our isolated self-systems of too much entropy can often drive us towards frenetic expenditure of energy, diverting efforts away from constructive focus within the self-system and from constructive reciprocity with our larger environment. We become energy spendthrifts, reactive, disempowering ourselves, distracted here and there by capricious thoughts, absorbed by traumatic feelings and largely oblivious to folly.

Remarkably, Pope Francis, in 2014, elaborated on the ways individuals in the Vatican organization, an isolated social system, isolate themselves and so increase the entropy of the system, decreasing its purposeful results internally within the system and externally in the world at large. He described 15 ways in which isolation of an individual increases system purposelessness.

First, the Pope described the “useful work” which is expected by the Vatican of all those who are to carry out its salvific mission: to improve and to grow in communion, holiness and wisdom in order to carry out fully that vocation.

Secondly, the Pope described what I refer to as entropy as “diseases, malfunctioning, infirmity and temptations which weaken our service to the Lord.”

1. The disease of thinking we are “immortal,” “immune” or downright “indispensable,” neglecting the need for regular check-ups. A Curia which is not self-critical, which does not keep up with things, which does not seek to be more fit, is a sick body. It is the disease of those who turn into lords and masters and think of themselves as above others and not at their service. It is often an effect of the pathology of power, from a superiority complex, from a narcissism which passionately gazes at its own image.
2. Another disease is the “Martha complex,” excessive busy-ness. It is found in those who immerse themselves in work and inevitably neglect “the better part.”
3. Then, too, there is the disease of mental and spiritual “petrification.” It is found in those who have a heart of stone, the “stiff-necked,” in those who in the course of time lose their interior serenity, alertness and daring and hide under a pile of papers, turning into *paper pushers* and not *men of God*. It is dangerous to lose the human sensitivity that enables us to weep with those who weep and to rejoice with those who rejoice! ... Being a Christian means “*having the same sentiments that were in Christ Jesus*,” sentiments of humility and unselfishness, of detachment and generosity.
4. The disease of excessive planning and of functionalism. When [one] plans everything down to the last detail and believes that with perfect planning things will fall into place, he becomes an accountant or an office manager. Things need to be prepared well, but without ever falling into the temptation of trying to contain and direct the freedom of the Holy Spirit, which is always greater and more flexible than any human planning (cf. Jn 3:8). We contract this disease because “it is always more easy and comfortable to settle in our own sedentary and unchanging ways. In truth, the Church shows her fidelity to the Holy Spirit to the extent that she does not try to control or tame him... to tame the Holy Spirit! ... He is freshness, imagination and newness.

5. The disease of poor coordination. Once its members lose communion among themselves, the body loses its harmonious functioning and its equilibrium; it then becomes an orchestra which produces noise: its members do not work together and lose the spirit of fellowship and teamwork. When the foot says to the arm, "I don't need you" or the hand says to the head, "I'm in charge," they create discomfort and scandal.
6. The disease of rivalry and vainglory.
7. The disease of existential schizophrenia. This is the disease of those who live a double life, the fruit of that hypocrisy typical of the mediocre and of a progressive spiritual emptiness which no doctorates or academic titles can fill ... they create their own parallel world.
8. The disease of gossiping, grumbling and back-biting.
9. The disease of idolizing superiors. This is the disease of those who court their superiors in the hope of gaining their favor. They are victims of careerism and opportunism; they honor persons and not God. They serve thinking only of what they can get and not of what they should give. Small-minded persons, unhappy and inspired only by their own lethal selfishness. Superiors themselves could be affected by this disease, when they court their collaborators in order to obtain their submission, loyalty and psychological dependency, but the end result is a real complicity.
10. The disease of indifference to others. This is where each individual thinks only of himself and loses sincerity and warmth of human relationships. When out of jealousy or deceit we take joy in seeing others fall instead of helping them up and encouraging them.
11. The disease of hoarding. When an apostle tries to fill an existential void in his heart by accumulating material goods, not out of need, but only in order to feel secure.
12. The disease of closed circles, where belonging to a clique becomes more powerful than belonging to the Body ... as Christ says, "Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste."
13. Lastly, the disease of worldly profit, of forms of self-exhibition. When an apostle turns his service into power and his power into a commodity in order to gain worldly profit or even greater power. ... Naturally, so as to put themselves on display and to show that they are more capable than others. This disease does great harm to the Body because it leads persons to justify the use of any means whatsoever to attain their goal, often in the name of justice and transparency.

Pope Francis insightfully specifies a number of ways in which individuals use their energies more to separate themselves into pursuing their own preferences than to engage with others and participate in the dynamics of a larger system which was both supporting them and also expecting contributions from them.

But seeking such isolation bringing upon us high entropy and low constructive impacts is not our only option. Depending on our attitude, we can import more or less energy or we can export more or less energy. Doing so determines the entropy vector of our self-system by engaging with external systems – less randomness – or by self-isolating – more randomness.

Current research in neurobiology has identified the two basic inner forces in each human being. Every baby within the mother's womb has two driving forces and they last all our lives. First, the inner impulse of "growing, growing, growing." The neurobiologist Gerald Hüther has defined this as "autonomy," the development of selfhood. The second force is a deep desire for relatedness, for communion and connection with others. Fromm and Hüther call this striving "love."

Erik Erikson spoke of our personal identity as a joinder of something inner and something outer from society which confirms what we believe about ourselves.

Our impulse for autonomy and our seeking relatedness are deeply influenced by experiences from childhood on. Sometimes, the impulse for autonomy can foster systemic isolation of self and marginalize our reaching out for relatedness. But looking outward can breakdown our isolation and lower our internal disorders. If a person overcomes systemic isolation and so starts fostering openness with a more vibrant consciousness, self-trust and trust in others, then they can experience empowerment and positive inner drives. This is development of the personality towards more systemic resilience and organic well-being.

Psychologist Hartmut Rosa's book, *Resonance: A Sociology of the Relationship to the World*, points to the essential focus of consciousness at work: a thriving, consistent awareness of inner resonances among our various energy fields and a wakeful awareness of our resonance with the environment. It begins with the assertion that the quality of a human life cannot be measured in terms of resources, options or moments of happiness. Rather, we should turn our attention to the connection to the world that informs that life and which, so long as that connection is intact, is an expression of stable relationships of resonance.

To support this claim, Rosa begins by presenting the entire spectrum of ways in which we establish a connection to the world, everything from breathing to culturally differentiated worldviews. Next, Rosa turns his attention to the concrete experiential and agential spheres – family and politics, work and sport, religion and art – where we look for resonance, but these days, find it less and less often. This, in turn, is linked to the accelerating logic of modernity, which is both the cause and the effect of a broken connection to the world, individually and collectively.

Maturity is minimizing chaos and so keeping entropy low. Being trustworthy, reliable and sought after for friendship are benefits of maturity.

Ethics and morality keep entropy low, our maturity firm and our resilience robust. They make our lives more worthwhile, more productive, more fulfilling and more happy.

Edmund Burke wrote insightfully on "manners" as a form of ethics and moral maturity:

"Manners are of more importance than laws. Upon them in a great measure, the laws depend. The law touches us, but here and there and now and then. Manners are what vex or soothe, corrupt or purify, exalt or debase, barbarize or refine us by a constant, steady, uniform, insensible operation, like that of the air we breathe in. They give their whole form and color to our lives. According to their quality, they aid morals, they supply them or they totally destroy them."

Moreover, when entropy becomes too high in too many individuals, social well-being suffers. Ethical competence can collapse if subjugated to chaos, with its diversions of attention and degradations of moral purpose. The interpersonal trust so necessary for social capital to maintain its reliability and robustness dies off in high entropy environments. Trust and social capital are not at all static or firm aggregations. Indeed, trust is continuously being eroded by everyday exchanges reflecting, as they do, all our human mistakes and miscalculations.

Trust and social capital are so necessary for individual and community well-being and so constitutive of wealth creation and social justice that great care must be given to providing individuals with the right amount of entropy – not too much.

It may also be that rights, as understood in the modern West and as vindicated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, when isolated from responsibility to others, add entropy to our social, cultural, economic and political systems. With an immoderate insistence on rights as unconditional entitlements, individuals empower themselves to focus only on their own needs and advantages, to the exclusion of others. Thus, we might be wise to reconsider the advantages of including virtue in rights-based political systems.

Interestingly, in 1997, a group of leaders proposed a little-known Universal Declaration of Human Responsibilities. The expected consequence of being responsible is an open self-system, one able to show concern for others. Article 4 of the declaration is “All people, endowed with reason and conscience, must accept a responsibility to each and all, to families and communities, to races, nations and religions in a spirit of solidarity: What you do not wish to be done to yourself, do not do to others.”

The contribution of ethics and morality to limiting the negative effects of entropy, I suggest, is what Aristotle intuited when he advocated virtue as the basis of happiness, what the Stoics understood with their recommendations for rigorous, open-minded assessment of what we perceive and hear, what the Daoists indicated with their absorption with the Dao, what the Buddha taught in recommending mindfulness, what Confucius sought in his prescription for keeping to virtue and acting with propriety, what the Qur’an revealed in its teachings about service of creation and what Christianity advanced with its ideal of doing unto others as you would have them do unto you.

Alexis de Tocqueville expressed the need for ethics as a check on entropy in his phrase “habits of the heart.” He ascribed the success of a democratic republic in the then new nation of America to American “habits of the heart.” By this, he meant “the different notions possessed by men, the various opinions current among them and the sum of ideas that shape mental habits ... the whole moral and intellectual state of a people.”

Then, Tocqueville had this observation about the importance of faith mindsets for human flourishing: “Considering religions from a purely human point of view, one can then say that all religions derive an element of strength, which will never fail, from man himself, because it is attached to one of the constituent principles of human nature.” That “constituent principle” might well be an unconscious, even physical need to limit the negative effects of entropy in our lives. Thus, we are guided by an invisible hand towards ethics and community.

Mindsets:

Each of us has a mindset which could be: a personality type; an ego identity; the way we look at the world and, accordingly, interpret reality, a coherent and stable worldview; a cultural disposition to think in line with our learned language; a religious conviction; a persistent emotional orientation; a self-concept which filters perceptions and structures interpretations.

Closed Mindsets:

Closed mindsets elevate entropy by leaving us isolated and less capable of working effectively with others. Cut off from others, much of our internal energy is then diverted to self-service - calming fears, stoking resentments and creating somatic responses to psychic disturbances. Closed mindsets give rise to mistrust and so destroy social capital. The inability to trust directs internal energy towards fear and worry, anxiety and aimless restlessness, reducing the capacity for effective work.

Some personality styles are conducive to self-isolation. One is arrogance, an overconfidence in not knowing that we don't know what is really important. A second such debilitating personality style is stubbornness, seeing consistency and certainty as virtues and so setting our minds in unyielding intellectual, emotional and ethical rigidity. The third such personality profile is feeling superior and special. A fourth style is being incorrigibly argumentative, naturally disagreeable, energized by conflict and seeking to crush the competition.

Fundamentalism

The fundamentalist mindset roots its perceptions of reality in textual literalism. It centers the mind on words, mostly written, as the source of authority, not to be challenged by our ability to interpret or put in context. Robert Frost described it well in his poem Mending Wall:

He moves in darkness as it seems to me,
Not of woods only and the shade of trees.
He will not go behind his father's saying,
And he likes having thought of it so well
He says again, 'Good fences make good neighbors.

There are a variety of well-known "fundamentalisms," each characterized by a dogmatism justified by an absolutist reductionism about what the "truth" really is. One thinks of religious fanatic-isms, fasc-ism, commun-ism, Mao-ism, neo-liberal-ism, rac-ism, woke-ism. Each such fundamentalism is an internally consistent, isolated intellectual system supported by a narrative and social enforcement mechanisms. The most powerful policing power in a fundamentalism is interior to believes. Each fundamentalist self-enforces through surrender of judgment to an ego-ideal or a super-ego which dictates right from wrong, who is good and who is evil, who has rights and who must be expunged from the community.

Narcissism

The narcissist mindset engages with reality through a narrow aperture. Only what resonates with self-needs is allowed to enter our inner life; what is inconsistent with self-needs or what upsets us is admitted only with restrictive conditions attached, marginalized with our invented rationalizations or just ignored - walled out from the self-system.

Where anything can be legitimated by reference only to our will, then nothing is reliably legitimate, as our will has no solid foundation in the external environment in which we live.

Freya India wrote in Quillette about her Gen Z cohort: “And yet, misery abounds. In the United States, 54 percent of Gen Z report anxiety and nervousness, according to researchers at the American Psychological Association. This is compared with only 40 percent of millennials and a national average of 34 percent. It isn’t just a case of self-report bias either, since the suicide rate for Americans aged between 15 and 24 has risen by over 51 percent in the last decade. For Gen Z women in particular, suicide rates have risen a staggering 87 percent since 2007. What lurks over my generation is not just a sense of misery, but meaninglessness. We exist in a state of lethargy and unfulfillment, tormented not by the tragedy of it all, but the futility.”

Is not such misery to be expected from a narcissistic personality? Substantial personal energy flows are diverted away from constructive purpose or the “work” output of our self-system and into whirl and incessant anxiety due to high entropy in the inwardly demanding, narcissistic self-system.

Other-Direction

If we import too much energy from the outside, we can have symptoms akin to high entropy unless we can constructively process that augmentation of possibility and turn it into good works. Sociologist David Riesman described personalities given to such excess importation as “other-directed.” The “other-directed” mindset leads ironically to a closing down of the self. Being too directed by others cripples the self-system, leaving it immature and fragile, incapable of much perseverance and coherence over time. Such a self is always engaged with others, as if it were in a perpetual pandemic of social media induced insecurities and upsets. An empty self is a kind of minimal self; not a lot of “there” there. A minimal self has little on the inside which it can impressively share with others to make its own mark on history. The “other-directed” personality is mostly along for the ride and avoids difficulties and responsibilities.

The “other-directed” personality increases its entropy through an over-dependence on external inputs. Such a self lacks firm internal principles and bounces back and forth from one external expectation to another, living in a perpetual randomness without a guiding and reliable purpose. In a sense, the impressions which we bring into our self-system add energy to reduce entropy, such imports do not change the other-directed self-system, but reinforce its uncertainty and anxiety, its isolation from stable and fulfilling engagements with its environment. This misuse of external inputs does not reduce such a self-system’s unending concern for the performative presentation of itself. Such misuse leaves a self-system subject

to high entropy. The other-directed person ends up with an inward isolation, fixated on an anxious fearfulness and pretty much is as dysfunctional as persons who cut themselves off from interpersonal relations. It is hard to order and constructively structure an other-directed personality.

If so untethered, we can easily become over stimulated; too much of what is in our minds can remain unprocessed, raw, unfocused energy, keeping us from being grounded, from making considered decisions, having inner peace, staying focused, being disciplined or dedicated. We feel vulnerable, seeking dependency on peers and powerful influencers or turning to self-medication.

Our self-concept can become unstructured, diffuse and shape-shifting, making us insecure and afraid. In a deep sense, we don't have much of a self at all, but bounce around as we are pulled and pushed by circumstances.

Social Darwinism

The social Darwinist mindset is a version of narcissism where the self-system is directed by a need to prevail in all things, regardless of others. The direction of our will finds its legitimacy in achieving dominion. Internal energy is directed outwardly in a random fashion in response to perceived threats or opportunities for selfish gain, in a cyclone constantly swirling in our minds. We worry about this and that slight, seek this or that advantage, our thoughts and emotions ceaselessly reacting, resisting, conniving, racing against time and circumstance. Social Darwinists lack empathy and the ability to trust others, suffering deficits in achieving successful collaboration and thereby losing social efficacy. Social Darwinists also divert considerable internal energy to the dysfunctional stoking of negative emotions in a fight or flight response to the world.

Open Mindsets:

Open mindsets lower entropy by keeping energy flows optimized. They access external energy flows for us, while having internal principles to apply through use of the moral sense, thus providing sufficient intentionality to keep randomness at the margins of our decision-making. With an open mindset, the self-system is closed to some extent, but open in other respects.

Aloneness for those with open mindsets can be a fruitful and very positive experience. There is a way in which being alone can actually lower entropy within the self-system. Meditation, solitude with appreciation of nature, music and art can be restorative for the self, strengthening one's sense of purpose, providing congress with the transcendental and affirming one's hold on meaning. But this experience of the grounding, which follows upon healthy contemplation and reflection, comes easiest to the mature. This kind of aloneness, thanks to our use of our self-system, provides connection and engagement with what is beyond the self.

Ethical

The ethical mindset balances internal energies with external realities. Ethics permits maturity of judgment on where to apply our energies and how to supplement or complement

our internal energies with constructive contributions from our environment, reducing our involvement with chaos.

The function of ethics, where entropy is concerned, is to find a balance between external and internal flows of energy to optimize the entropy contextualizing our way forward in life. That optimal point is not too much and not too little. Too much entropy keeps us off balance with excessive randomness. Too little entropy confines us within a cage without much freedom to take initiatives. Some randomness is useful. Too much order, in its own way, can become life-depriving, a kind of desiccation of the spirit, lowering resilience in the face of change and challenge.

We can posit as a credible hypothesis that in the self-system, the function of ethics resembles that of a transformer with flows of electricity – it can step or step down the rate of flow. Transformers have become essential for the transmission, distribution and utilization of alternating current electric power. Within us, ethics has pride of place in the regulation and allocation of energy flows for sustainable advantage – towards randomness or towards skillful and intentional workmanship. Bad ethics turns the self-system towards high entropy, while good ethics does the reverse. Good ethics points the self-system towards low entropy and more work.

The ethical self-system happily assumes responsibility, turning the busyness (and the business) of life, its randomness, into a personal calling, work into vocation.

There is an aesthetics to ethics, which brings forth proportion and interdependence, symmetrical or asymmetrical, as the artist chooses. Thus, a life can become a work of art.

Closely related to ethics in its functionality is the classical liberalism popularized by the English thinkers John Locke, Adam Smith, William Blackstone and John Stuart Mill. That liberalism, organized politically as constitutional democracy with checks and balances, economically as free market capitalism and culturally as freedoms of religion, thought and speech, is a process system, seeking balance among its propelling energies. It is intentionally not a fundamentalism attempting to impose a perpetual status quo on those it controls.

Hebrew

In the Old Testament, God breaks through the separation begun with Adam and Eve with covenants – with Noah, Abraham and Moses. Covenanting is the joinder of two or more systems in common purpose.

Abraham was asked by God to leave his home and become a pilgrim in strange lands. He was asked to give up known and secure moorings to take risks, to expose himself to danger and loss. The parable of Abraham is that we, too, should leave the comfort of protected isolation and brave the wider world in order to live more fully and leave our mark on the sands of time.

The effect of covenant is to expand the circumference of the self to include those also parties to the covenant. In the Hebrew case, the major covenants linked the individual to the entire force field of creation as God described himself to Moses simply as “I that Am” – being itself.

Entering into contract brings responsibility for something external to our self, breaking down walls between us and those to whom we owe obligations and service. We gain for ourselves by the giving of ourselves in reciprocity and mutuality.

The dynamic of covenant follows stipulated rules of behavior, rather than moral precepts and ethical principles, which must be applied by the individual to specific cases. The Hebrew covenantal framework was a “thou shall” and “thou shall not” set of commands, as we read in the Ten Commandments, given to the Hebrew people through Moses. “You shall observe to do therefore as the Lord your God has commanded you; you shall not turn aside to the right or to the left.” (Deuteronomy 5) Pointedly, the results of living by the commands given by Yahweh are engagements with others. Many additional commands from Yahweh specify ritual formalities. But even conforming to such external behavioral requirements takes us out of our own minds and places us in a psychic and behavioral space created by others. We move from the confines of our imagination to a wider sphere of communal purpose.

Similarly, in the Hebrew books of wisdom, included in the Old Testament of the Christian Bible, we are taught that wisdom and knowledge, the intentional opening of our minds to wider truths, will keep us true to the covenantal provisions linking us to God’s favor and blessings.

In the book of Ecclesiastes, we learn that our actions should conform to the time, not to our will – “there is a time for every purpose under heaven.” The time for birth is not the time to die; the time to plant should not be used for uprooting. We are born into a process and live in that process. To be successful, we must synchronize with the process in which we are. Since our well-being comes from participation in wholeness, our liveliness is more robust if we are open to that larger order of circumstance. “Contempt for the word is self-destructive, respect for the commandment wins salvation.” (Proverbs 13:13) “Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall.” (Proverbs 16:18) “Disappointment crowns the labors of the wicked; whoever sows uprightness reaps a solid reward.” (Proverbs 11:18) Whoever misgoverns a house inherits the wind.” (Proverbs 11:29)

We read that “Where there is no “vision” (or “revelation,” “divine guidance”), the people “perish” (or “cast off restraint,” “run wild”), but “blessed” (or “joyful,” “happy”) is he who “heeds wisdom’s instruction” (or “keeps the law”). (Proverbs 29:18)

The prophets of the Old Testament called again and again for a return to the covenant. Not to walk in the way of the Lord is self-isolating, following the sinful course chosen by Adam and Eve, and leads to self-centered presumptions. So, when shepherds feed themselves, but not the flocks in their care, they lose their authority. (Ezekiel 34) Jeremiah warned the Hebrews that if they did not follow the Lord’s ways, he would “mar the pride of Judah and the great pride of Jerusalem” because with such pride, they had become an evil people, walking in the imagination of their heart.” (Jeremiah 13:10)

But a limitation to this covenantal approach is that the community into which we can expand our identity is restricted. Only those party to the covenant are fully included within the ambit of our ethical structure. Intensely internalized group identities make for collective cohesion and more order within the group, but at the cost of remaining self-consciously apart from other groups with their own identities. Such internalized identities give rise to the human

phenomenon of tribalism.

Thus, while the covenantal paradigm could reduce internal entropy for an individual, it runs the risk of isolating the larger community living under common covenant, either from other communities or from being itself. This encouragement of entropy within the covenantal community through self-imposed isolation may well divert energies away from constructive engagements with others. The text of Deuteronomy said expressly that the Hebrews were a “stiff-necked people,” an indication of determined self-purposing.

Ethics, then, applied to a collective, works hard to open it up to other groups and so to reduce its internal entropy.

Stoic

The Stoic mindset concentrates internal energy on reflection and judgment, to guide it away from emotions and stressful sensations. This mindset replaces chaos with order and so enhances our effectiveness as a person.

Confucian

Confucius advised that one should seek the power bestowed by virtue (te), which draws to one the admiration of others. The path towards virtue lies in self-control out of respect for others, in assuming role responsibility. He admonished that “a lord should lord; a minister minister, a father father and a son son.” The faculty of self-control is propriety, which demanded sincerely internalizing decorum and good manners. For Confucius, the one word which would be a sufficient guide for living well was “reciprocity.” Mencius would add the internal psychic capacities to be outwardly engaged – humanness – and to always be in a properly mutual relationship with others.

Daoist

The Daoist mindset focuses the self-system outward towards natural flows of energy and tendencies. This mindset follows the Dao in order to maximize access to external energy fields. Daoism emphasizes minimizing our intentional deployment of only internal energy externally in order to impose our will beyond our self.

In the Yin/Yang tradition, which gave rise to the medical arts of acupuncture and the health disciplines of Tai Qi and Qi Gong, harmonizing internal energy flows of different valences and vectors (Qi) with external Qi flows was a very intentional opening of the person, both physically and mentally to the world. The exchange flow in exercises is the breath, breathing in and breathing out. One can also internalize Qi from the earth through locating one’s house or office (geomancy). Since Qi flows through time, one can analyze the 64 different YiJing hexagrams to intuit the best course of action to align one’s personal force and intentions with circumstances.

Buddhist

The Buddhist mindset seeks steady perseverance in living according to and being part of

reality – the Dharma. The Dharma sustains creation. It is within us and beyond us. Keeping ourselves aware and in synchronicity with life forces is avoiding extremes, following a “middle path.” The recommendation has analogies to Aristotle’s preference for building virtue through keeping to a mean.

Buddhist thinkers articulated a set of inner energy vectors which waste energy on dysfunctions within the personality and chaotic misadventures. These are the Kleshas. They consist of: greed, hate, delusion, conceit, wrong views, doubt, torpor, restlessness, shamelessness and recklessness.

Islamic

Qur’anic revelation emphasizes humanity’s participation in God’s creative order, rather than individualized insulation in our own self-directed personas. The Qur’an relates that God created men and women as His khalifas, His stewards, co-managers of his creation. As such, each of us has fiduciary responsibilities to others, to society and to the environment, responsibilities which necessarily lead us, intellectually and emotionally, out of our isolation and engage us with larger living systems.

In serving as a khalifa in God’s creation, the Qur’an sets this expectation for us: have faith and do good works. Both faith and works open the individual up to externals. The contribution of faith is providing the individual with externalization of self through attachment to an energy field provided by a larger purpose. The contribution of good works is having the individual avoid self-magnification.

The Qur’an also instructs that we should live by the Mizan or in balance. The direction is to avoid extremes and accept intersecting and overlapping multiplicities. Finding such a balance of necessity takes us out of absolute self-absorption to consider external dynamics and realities.

Christian

The foundational Hebrew narrative, accepted later by Christians, is a story about isolation, the separation of humanity from God. The act of Adam and Eve in eating the apple from the tree of knowledge might be a metaphor for turning away from larger purpose and its sustaining energies to import energies (knowledge of good and evil) focusing on the self within, which energy then, in a more isolated system, sets off an increase in entropy, in meaninglessness, random expenditures of energies and in losing vocational purposefulness.

When knowledge is deposited in an insulated self-system, it succumbs to entropy. Its potential is not maximized; its efficacy dissipates as it fragments into random, un-coordinated adventures; it experiences more and more episodes of cognitive dissonance, instances of rivalry and competition among its disparate notions about this and that. Such lessening of its capacity for doing useful work facilitates the rise of narcissism and hubris, as well as incorrigible, small-minded insolence.

The isolation through disconnection from God is an anthropocentricity, a self-magnification of ourselves, which encloses the self-system in itself and so increases its internal entropy.

In the Old Testament, Adam and Eve think of themselves first in accepting the serpent's advice, that eating of the fruit. They fully internalized the purposes of their personality, thereby separating themselves from God's will.

Once out of Eden, Adam and Eve are mortal – from birth to death, from dust to dust, completely contained for a span of years within a living organism, condemned to giving their energies over to sorrow and arduous labor.

Perhaps a way of thinking about the Christian doctrine of “sin,” which we are told came into the world with Adam and Eve, in the context of the Second Law of Thermodynamics would be to consider it a state of chaos, high entropy and disorder in our isolated self-systems. Such fragmentation of purpose disconnects us from the transcendent, a source of energy which could empower us to be whole and of goodwill.

Cain, the older son of Adam and Eve, became wroth with anger in an episode of chaotic emotionalism when God favored his younger brother Able. Cain is thus absorbed with his internal pain, with his selfishness. Cain then kills his brother, selfishly rationalizing his deed with the rhetorical question, “Am I my brother's keeper?” God, then, puts a mark on Cain so that he will always be recognized and shunned – isolated from all others and left to his own randomness.

Through another gracious covenant of God, Jesus, according to the Christian narrative, is sent to redeem humanity by offering a way out of personal isolation and a return to communion with God. The way (“Dao”) of Jesus is essentialized in the second commandment – love others as we love ourselves. In other words, don't self-isolate. As Pope Francis wrote, “Being a Christian means having the same sentiments that were in Christ Jesus.”

In the Gospel of Matthew, we read that Jesus spoke of humanity as not born for isolation when he said that we do not live by bread alone – consumption for self - but by every word of God – experiencing direct participation in a larger source of vitality and meaning. The way we can escape self-isolation, taught to us by Jesus, is to “love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind.” Jesus also affirmed that the Kingdom of God is within us, making possible personal transcendence of self-isolation.

Jesus insisted on forgiveness, which naturally engages us with those others who have stepped on our amour propre/amour de soi, damaged our interests or hurt us physically. He taught: “... if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.’ And he proposed asking the Lord God to enable us to “forgive those who trespass against us.”

For Jesus reducing self-isolation through social action was important – feeding the hungry, giving water to the thirsty and taking in strangers. In the parable of the Good Samaritan, the story elevates the capacity for engagement and caring of the Samaritan over the distancing of the priest and the Levite, who just passed by the man in need of succor.

“For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.”

But when institutional Christianity becomes dogmatized and institutionalized, it confirms for individuals their existential isolation and necessary entropic despair.

(I am grateful to my colleagues Michael Wright, Richard Bents, John Dalla Costa, William Graham, John Little, Ven. Anil Sakya and Andreas Suchanek for their helpful advice.)

QAnon, One of Entropy's Political Faces

Rich Broderick

Most Americans are well aware of QAnon, an online conspiracy theory consisting of messages supposedly transmitted by an anonymous, but high-ranking figure working in the U.S. government who communicates online under the letter "Q."

Though QAnon has been the subject of considerable news coverage in the U.S., most people in the world have likely never heard of it. Suffice it to say, it is the subject of wide spread coverage by U.S. news media, as well as by citizens who are convinced that QAnon offers observations and predications of enormous consequence.

While the controversy over QAnon is an American peculiarity, the connection between following such mystical oracles and the living of stressful lives may be universal. A well-grounded social philosophy, such as the moral capitalism of the Caux Round Table, hopefully offers all societies more constructive, humane and sustainable cultural vistas than the invention and dissemination of occult thought.

QAnon has been around for several years, but in the past year, it has risen as part of the melodrama of chaos that's occurred over the past 12 months in America that includes: the mob breaking into the Capital building; the more than half a million fatalities caused by Covid-19; the death of George Floyd while in police custody and the ensuing riots and demonstrations; and the rise of racism to the top of America's social agenda.

It's easy to ridicule and dismiss the heatstroke fantasies of QAnon, which is the standard approach of most of America's mainstream media.

To cite one of QAnon's earlier theories, it's difficult even for those who may have a strong dislike of Hillary Clinton to give credence to rumors that she might be running a child trafficking scheme out of a D.C. pizza parlor, with the idea that the world is run by giant lizards (though I like the image) who live on the blood of children or that Donald Trump might have been busy organizing a revolt against the Deep State, one of the primary targets of QAnon pronouncements.

And yet. And yet....

Throughout history and around the world, human beings, from time to time, have turned to conspiracy theories, sometimes even more bizarre than QAnon. These have tried to theorize the reasons the world was not revolving in a comprehensible fashion, but according to spells cast by Jews, Muslims, secret cells of witches and sorcerers, the Illuminati, Rosicrucians, Madame Blavatsky, Satanists, the Order of the Golden Dawn, Aleister Crowley, Aimee Semple McPherson, Timothy Leary, Jim Jones... and on and on.

Though peculiar, the rise of QAnon is not just testimony to the breakdown of America's educational system or the spread of media outlets trafficking in propaganda, though these and other factors have played a role. It is, in fact, testimony to the large and ever-growing percentage of the American public who are now members of a political and economic precariat or a class of people who live without a secure sense of material well-being or political clout. These are people living on the edge of a cliff, a slice of the American populace that now includes a growing segment of white middle and working class citizens living with a growing dread of the future and a diminishing sense of being able to exert any control on its outcome.

It seems reasonable to suggest that a kind of entropy is at the root of QAnon and other movements like it over the years. It is of critical importance that we, in the chattering class, do not assume that those who embrace QAnon's irrational, even crazy tropes are themselves irrational or crazy. QAnon may express itself in insane theories and predictions, but this does not mean that all or even most Americans who embrace the movement are crazy, unless we recognize that they are crazy with uncertainty and fears that are well-founded in the realities of American life.



In seeking to address QAnon, it is not only useless, but actively counterproductive to focus on the conspiracy's bizarre expression, rather than on the forces that have led people to embrace its ideas. Rather than contenting ourselves with smug ridicule of QAnon and those who've fallen under its spell, the best path forward is to address the reasons why this movement has emerged with such force, those reasons being the rising sense of insecurity and the lack of political and social control among an increasing number of Americans. The theories these Americans embrace may be crazy, but not because a huge cross-segment of Americans are crazy, but because they live in a very real state of precarity.

The most effective way to address QAnon is to address that sense of insecurity – a prime example of the effects of political entropy – and take steps to address the sources of that insecurity with effective reforms of our political and economic systems. We need to show a growing, rather than shrinking percentage of citizens, that their lives and beliefs have a demonstrable effect on the way the world works, to repudiate QAnon, while embracing the people who have fallen under it.

Any other path is irrational and only likely to drive even more Americans into the arms of bizarre conspiracy theories.

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On Entropy: The Second Law of Thermodynamics – Application for the Good Life

Michael Hartoonian

Steve Young's essay on entropy presents a brilliant metaphor for living the good life. I am reminded of Pericles, Athens' first citizen, and his articulation of the necessity of the dual mindset (the democratic mind, 431 B.C.):

“Here each individual is interested not only in his own affairs, but in the affairs of the city as well. Even those who are most occupied with their own business are, extremely well informed on general well-being. We do not say that a man who takes no interest in his city, is a man who minds his own business. We say that he has no business at all.”

Living well is a team sport; it is a relational performance with others that can produce synergy if engaged with purpose. The future does leave footprints in the present, meaning that the “arrow of time” is already in flight and directionality of movement and speed are vulnerable to all the vagaries of life. Entropy is built in – it is, indeed, a law. There is turbulence. It can, however, be calmed.

The calming begins with the understanding of sin. Sin is another word for separation – from God, from each other and from the earth. And sin is a separation from our generational covenant, with ancestors and with our children's children. Without such a contract, we let loose the monster of abandonment, which is randomness. As Thomas Hobbes suggested:

*“Words are the counters of wise men and the money of fools. No arts; no letters; no society; and which is worst of all, continual fear and danger of violent death; and the life of man **solitary**, poor, nasty, brutish and short. The first and fundamental law of Nature, which is to seek peace and follow it...Hell is truth seen too late.”*

But, Steve argued in his essay:

“The function of ethics and morality is to keep our self-system open and minimize the chaos in our lives (destabilizations, loss of constructive purpose and self-control) arising from internal intellectual and emotional chaos - neuroses and psychoses – and from chaotic interactions with our environment.”

“The randomness in our isolated self-systems of too much entropy can often drive us towards frenetic expenditure of energy, diverting efforts away from constructive focus within the self-system and from constructive reciprocity with our larger environment. We become energy spendthrifts, reactive, disempowering ourselves, distracted here and there by capricious thoughts, absorbed by traumatic feelings and largely oblivious to folly.”

How does one get to the realization of the power of ethics and connectedness? In a word – responsibility.

As Young sites, in 1997, a group of leaders proposed a Universal Declaration of Human Responsibilities. The expected consequence of being responsible is an open self-system, a feedback loop, one able to show concern for others. Article 4 of the declaration is “All people, endowed with reason and conscience, must accept a responsibility to each and all, to families and communities, to races, nations and religions in a spirit of solidarity: What you do not wish to be done to yourself, do not do to others.”

Another way of expressing the Golden Rule is “reciprocal duty.”

The calming remedy for entropy is to have a response ability. This is the only path to a happy and full life. The poetry is quite beautiful. The pursuit of responsibility is more essential than the pursuit of happiness because the temple of happiness can only be entered through the gate of responsible behavior and the courtyard of purpose.

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