

A VOCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE

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What do people want from life?

That is a basic, vitally important, intensely intimate, and wholly individual question, which shockingly few people have ever taken the time and thought to answer clearly and intelligently; and the ignorance, shortsightedness, and mental inertia which are to blame for this deplorable condition make up one of the main things the matter with us today.

The average person is a good bit like the man who wandered up to the ticket window in a railway station and murmured, "I'd like a ticket, please."

"What station?" barked the busy clerk.

"Well, what stations have you?" inquired the undecided one.

If you think that's a funny story, try asking ten or twenty young people, and an equal number of those who are not so young, without any preamble, "Just what are you planning to do with your life? What do you think you are here for?" and note their reactions carefully and thoughtfully.

I will venture to say that, if you will carry out that experiment, as outlined, that story will not seem funny to you any more, for you will see it as a tragic allegory of millions of pointless lives, which are so because they are not based upon a sound philosophy.

Science asks but one question of the universe—"How?" And all our laboratories and research institutes, through all the years, have answered only a tiny fraction of that question; but as fast as they have formulated their fragmentary answers, philosophy has seized upon them and propounded the truly fundamental

question, "Why?" Without the answer to that interrogation, the findings of science are hollow and ephemeral, for they do not go back to the place where things *begin*.

A poet, who was also a philosopher, once said, "Only the intangibles are sure."

Don't take his word for it. *Test* it by the standard of your own experience, and then you'll *know* whether he was right. What *lasts*?

The money a man earns in any skilled trade or profession may be lost or wasted in a wide variety of ways; but the *skill* that earned it lasts as long as his physical body holds together—and *long after that*, for skill is a manifestation of energy, and energy is indestructible, though it may change its form.

A house may burn to the ground and cease entirely to be a *house*, though its physical elements are not destroyed; but the *dream* of that house, in the architect's mind, is not lost. He can reproduce it, every beam and window and brick. That *lasts*!

Follow through along this line, with your own illustrations, and when you are convinced, out of your own knowledge, that the poet-philosopher was right, you will recognize that no vocational study, or any other activity in life, can be of any real and permanent value unless it is based upon intangibles. Of course all purely physical activities are absolutely conditioned by those universal intangibles that we call "the Laws of Nature."

The only "original sin," and the obstacle that man has been striving, for

millions of years, to overcome, is *ignorance*. We have made some headway, but not nearly so much as most people like to believe. The road ahead of us is far longer than the rough little stretch that is behind.

But that need not discourage us, for an exceedingly small number of us possess more than a minute fraction of the intangible (but utterly *real*) knowledge that is *now available*, so that we can profitably employ several lifetimes in catching up with what is *now* known, without considering any new additions that may be made to the total in the meantime.

The first foundation-stone of a rational and workable life philosophy is the recognition and acceptance of the idea that, behind all of the facts that we know about this completely law-governed (and therefore *intelligently operating*) universe, and all its manifestations that we can *observe* (though we may not understand them), there *must be* an incalculably vast storehouse of power and knowledge which we have not yet tapped, and an inconceivably fertile and foreseeing Intelligence directing it all, which we may call God, or by any other name that suits us best.

Many seem to feel that, along this line, intelligently directed study is impossible or would be futile. Time does not permit me to go into this matter at length, but I assure you, of my personal knowledge, that such an idea is erroneous. The constantly growing literature in this field is already large and varied, and the opportunities for personal experimentation are practically limitless. The thoroughly scientific investigations of extrasensory perceptions, which Dr. J. B. Rhine, of Duke University, has been making during the past few years, are only the first short step, under "Orthodox" auspices, but sincere and industrious individuals have gone much further.

There is an old tale about an interested and curious traveler who came upon a group of men busily shaping masses of stone into regular blocks. He accosted one of them with the question, "What are you doing, friend?" The man looked at him blankly, wiped the sweat from his forehead, and growled, "Earnin' a measly six dollars a day." To the same question another replied, scarcely raising his eyes from his work, "I'm cutting nice,

square blocks of stone for the masons." A third, similarly interrogated, raised his eyes to the clouds sailing over and whispered, "I'm building a cathedral, sir."

There, if you will study it a bit, you will find sketched the entire intangible (and therefore enduring) philosophy of all vocational effort, and it is on this foundation that we must build the vocational structure of the future.

The first question that one must ask, in connection with a vocation (and *answer*, clearly, directly, and with intelligence) is, "What do I truly *want* to do, above all other things?" The second is, "Just what *equipment*, tangible and intangible, will be required for doing this work?" And the third is, "Do I now possess such equipment, or am I ready and eager to spend the time, effort, and money to acquire it?"

The answer to the first question is intangible (involving *ideals*) and *basic*, and unless it is sharply formulated, in detail, the others cannot be answered. If it is so formulated (which is pitifully rare), the answers to the two others will determine whether the individual will pursue his first choice, or will be content with a second, third, or twentieth, and this is a matter involving *character* (another intangible).

The individual wholly without ideals is or becomes a hobo, a "bum"; from those whose ideals are few and easily attained are recruited the millions of W.P.A. workers and satisfied recipients of government doles. No amount or type of vocational guidance or training will "take" on a person who has no ambition, no standards, none of that divine and intangible *afflatus* which makes featherless bipeds *men*.

Among those who appear to be in this unpromising category there are some who will work out of it if the intangible and wholly subjective quality or condition called *interest* can be stimulated by some internal or external circumstance, over which outsiders have but slight, remote, and indirect control. The change in outlook, if it is to be permanent, must be self-generated.

This change has been brought about, in many, by "exposing" them to the ideas that the laws of evolution and of cause and effect operate throughout the universe, at all levels of consciousness, and eternally, so that every man, at any par-

ticular moment, is the mathematically exact product of *his own* activities during his cosmic and finite past, and there are no such things as punishment or reward, but merely the impersonal and inexorable *results* of causes set in motion, at some time, by the man, himself.

On this basis it is evident that, not only must every one of us *pay*, in one way or another, for all he gets out of life, but also that we can *have* out of life anything for which we are willing to pay in the medium of exchange suitable to the nature of our ideals, which is rarely money, but far more often time, unremitting effort, physical self-denial, and other intangible units of value.

We are here in life for the intangible purpose of *growing* or evolving, as human souls, by developing such rudimentary faculties and powers as we possess through exercise; by gaining knowledge and transmuting it into *wisdom* by putting it to work and studying the results; and by learning to understand other people, so that *sympathy* may grow into impersonal or divine *compassion*, as we become able to function at higher levels of the universe, which is inseparably *one*, in all of the four dimensions in which we are now working, and so far beyond that that we are now totally unable to conceive of it.

Sketched thus briefly, this sounds like a decidedly tenuous and unsubstantial doctrine, but any one who is willing to *pay*, in time and effort, for more detailed information, can get it. The fact that it is worth what it costs is shown, pragmatically, by its tangible results in the material world.

If our present system of loaves for loafers, which permits idlers to subsist on a low level, at the expense of industrious citizens, were to be abolished next week, its supposed beneficiaries would discover that they had paid an excessively high price for eating without work, in the loss of the *ability* to work productively.

Among the voluntary workers, the lowest wages are paid to those who work with their bodies *only*, and the scale of remuneration rises in direct proportion as they add to their working machinery the intangible emotional, mental, and intuitional faculties, so that the highest financial returns of all go to the men who, transcending even intellect, rise to

those rarefied heights where only *geniuses*, in industry, commerce, the professions, and all other fields, can breathe. And all the way up, the progress is steady, regular, orderly, and *step by step*.

When a sufficient measure of this philosophic viewpoint has been attained (consciously or unconsciously) to permit a man or woman to dream the dreams that are the necessary precursors of all accomplishment, such an individual will be eager to learn how his dreams can be objectified, and at this point, but not before, vocational guidance and training can begin to perform their beneficent functions, the first of which is to stimulate and assist the candidate for self-motivated advancement in *formulating* his aspirations in clear-cut detail, which is, by far, the hardest part of the *steady* progress on an *uphill road*, which is *education*, in its largest sense.

With the goal clearly in sight, the climber, with such assistance as we can give him, must make as objective and impersonal an *inventory* as is possible of his physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual assets and liabilities, so that he can determine what excess baggage of habits, prejudices, superstitions, and the like must be jettisoned, and what supplies and equipment for the journey before him he lacks, so that he may set about procuring them.

Here intelligent, experienced, and deeply sympathetic helpers can give invaluable assistance, if they can divest themselves of an obvious sense of superiority and of the urge to preach, and bring into play that near-divine faculty which the psychologists call *empathy*.

The elements of a sound vocational philosophy of life may be outlined as:

1. The vital realization that every human soul is a part of an inescapable evolutionary scheme that will carry him forward; but that he can increase the speed and ease of his progress by *learning how it operates* and then *cooperating* with it, *consciously*.
2. The clear perception and definite formulation of an individual objective for this lifetime.
3. An eagerness to attain that objective which will make any labors and trials involved in the process seem inconsequential.
4. A cool and impersonal inventory of one's *total* assets and liabilities, followed

by intelligent and considered action upon its results.

5. The acquirement of wisdom through employed knowledge; of faculties and powers through disciplined and continuous exercise; and of loving sympathy

through observing, understanding, and helping other people.

6. Recognition of the fact that the index of any man's value to society (and therefore to himself) is the degree of his ability to *cooperate* and *contribute*.
