



CREATIVE
Obsession

Philosophic Life in Broad Daylight

AN APOMARY

V I A T O R E . O ' L E V I T E R

SECOND EDITION

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PRELUDE

Phenomenal success, truckloads of cash, and hundreds of very close friends are nice things to have, and so naturally, we want them desperately. But what most people *really* want, if not the obvious trappings, is to have interesting, *positively fascinating* lives. A penniless man (in an old fable) will be perfectly content, provided he does not suffer from a cold and boring existence, while a rich man will be miserable to the end, if he can no longer stand the muddled routines of his predictable life.

We humans are a frantic lot — absolutely, wholeheartedly crazy to have interesting lives. In childhood and beyond, year after year, we strive to experience the most astonishing, enthralling events. So, what stops us? Why do we, time and again, lose pleasure in what we are becoming? Why do so many irrepressible souls grow so amazingly decrepit?

The problem, I think, is that we succumb to our fears. We feel it in our bones that an interesting life is a dangerous desire. Life's imposing fascination and dire endeavors, this *imperative to adapt* is the very meaning of risk, where grievous injury and abrupt endings are rife. Also, to the extent we remain unimpressed by the grinding habits and faceless regularity of civilized life, we become less disposable and poorly disposed to various enterprises — and so in *natural* worlds, where scarcity is as predictable as the extinction of species, we bow to the dismally doubling toil and increasingly volatile, *economic* troubles at hand. Lastly, we tremble like lost kittens, while the *blessings of community* appear more distant and less assuring, should we venture “outside the box,” and there may be extra piles of ridicule and increasingly indisposing indignities to deal with. The chance of becoming a genuine oddball (a lonely eccentric, a pathetic apostate) is much greater, whenever someone seeks to command his or her own destiny.

It's the job of preachers and pundits to remind us of our fears as often as possible. This may seem meddling and intrusive, but instead, let's take it for what it is — a fair warning. Still, our loftiest aspirations (these primordial desires) remain unaffected. We will engage

life fervidly, in a first and last embrace. We will build and cultivate interesting, cherished lives, as far as our abilities, learning, and good fortune should allow. We propose to examine this existence intensely, and then even *more* intensely, come what may.

Such a deliberate and torrid engagement exemplifies the *philosophic* life. It favors clarity of thought, courage of choice, and a circumspect knowledge. All of this is interrelated. And so in philosophy, as in life, there evolves theories of meaning, methodologies and conceptions of reality — a seamless web, woven over the millennia from the common threads of human experience. It offers us a noble, perilous ethic, where one's own existence might become one's own creative obsession.

• • •

Dear reader, the “apomary” is a *literary mosaic* of assorted, *aphoristic fragments* pieced and puzzled into pixelated, “*aporistic*” *pictures*. It lays out densely layered, brief segments in a meticulously reduced concoction of theme, tense, mood, metaphor, and grammatical person, forming webs of characters, settings, and events that congeal into dynamic dioramas of the mind, like the solidifying dots of a realistic wirephoto, or the

haunting images of a pointillistic masterpiece (the fine details of a linear language further transposed into spheres of crystalized understanding).

The apomary's conjoining aphorisms, apothegms, and apologues (the spiraling abstracts, epigrams, and parables) suffuse and illuminate an abiding plot that's not too hard to get, especially if you like to indulge occasionally in well-chewed and mulled-over, blissful bouts of reading. The story is about creative people of all stripes, who live and work passionately, resiliently, and with their eyes wide open. It is a *saga of humanity*, a tale of the undaunted, living soul of a distressed species, which I've told in as few words and with all the depiction I could handle. Under the circumstances, the Afterword must serve as my intrinsically incomplete and, if I may, respectfully submitted explanation.

The protagonist and narrator of *Creative Obsession* (this metamorphic memoir and not-so-massive missive) is Homer Dogg — a hardcore traveler, an honest scholar, and an infatuated artist. His character is an admixture, as his name suggests, of two broadly representative personas from Greek antiquity. The first, of course, is Homer, the blind poet, the artist who gave us Odysseus and Hector. The second is Diogenes,

a.k.a. “the Dog,” the greatest bohemian perhaps there ever was, the godfather of all virtuously declared and openly waged counterculture.

— VEO



NO EXIT

Suppose you realized suddenly that you were buried inside a small, dark vault under a 200-foot mudslide. You have maybe a six or an eight-hour air supply, assuming the walls of the vault don't cave-in first. In no uncertain terms, there is absolutely no hope for getting out alive. An unseen, unstoppable clock begins ticking away the last minutes and hours of your life.

Now cast your fate. You have two choices: (1) Remain calm, and then die. (2) Do something, and then die.

The first choice defers the unpleasanties. It ensures tranquility, and it upholds precious dignities. Who would reproach our sisters and brothers, who in the throes of grief and mortal terror, seek a path to inner peace? Who would wish to disprove another person's quiet prayer for eternal salvation? The first choice engenders the great religious and mystic movements.

It was the monumental choice of Orpheus, Ezekiel, Philo, and Paul. It is the vision and choice made possible through faith, hope, and blessed mercy.

But whenever these timeless qualities have been nurtured and transfigured, under our most primordial affections, into a semblance of wisdom, courage, and love, a vision of the vault becomes a commandment to act. A sublime imperative comes into effect — it is a *perversion* to squander away the last hours. It is a grotesque waste to disregard the inevitable, fleeting choices which unfold during life. We confront voracious, world-effacing desires for ever more engaging and enduring work. We are shaken from our hallucinations and stupors by life's acute limitation, with the understanding that a person lives and thrives, or does not, through all that is perceived and created, and in the end, by what got done.

What will you *do* then, down in the vault? . . . Start digging — what the hell. Scratch an epitaph into the wall. Tremble and laugh . . .

HOME RUN

It happened that a prudent man was alone in his hotel room, at the end of a routine business trip, when he fell into a fitful sleep.

He had an extremely realistic dream. He was at Yankee Stadium, but he was in uniform! He had finally made it to the majors! Not only that, the manager had just called on him to pinch-hit with the bases loaded, the game was on the line, and the crowd was going wild!

As the prudent man was selecting his bat — finding one that would look splendid, but wasn't too heavy — the manager came over to him. "Listen up, Kid," said the manager. "This game is different. There's no balls and no strikes. You get to play in just one game. You're getting just one at-bat, and you get just *one* pitch. You got that?"

The prudent man nodded, but he was distracted by the cheering crowd. He felt immensely important as he

stepped-up to the plate. The fearsome pitcher tried to stare him down, but the prudent man would *certainly not* look him in the eye. Then the pitcher delivered a scorching fastball, which looked a little high and maybe just a bit outside, so the prudent man didn't swing. (He just stood there, prudently.)

"Yerrrrr OUT!" shouted the umpire, and the crowd went stone-cold silent. Then the manager motioned the prudent man toward the showers. "That's it, Kid," he said. "You're through."

The prudent man jolted up. He was shaking, hyperventilating — in a suffocating panic. "I shall *never* have this horrible nightmare, *ever again!*" said the prudent man to himself, alone in his hotel room.

And in fact, he did not have this nightmare again, until a couple of years later, when the doctors told him that the tumor in his brain was a hopeless case. After that, for the last days of his life, the prudent man had this same nightmare whenever he fell asleep, and it became more terrifying to him each time.

THE SUFFICIENCY OF REASON

That a “sufficient reason” exists for everything we could ever put our minds to, is just an ugly truism, gussied-up like a beautiful principle.

That our conception of effects is the *sum and substance* of our concept of a cause, is a downright beautiful truism, which comes in the guise of an ugly principle.

— APHORISTIC —

The aphorism is artwork of fastidiously refined, didactic prose that is punctuated by metaphoric language, the elucidation of philosophic experience, and brevity. The merest possibility of authentic, aphoristic originality constrains the writer to ponder protolinguistically, while resorting methodically and *seamlessly* to every tool and competency of the rhetorical art. The reader of aphorisms, if he or she is systematically inclined, may wish to identify the various syntheses of interlaced figures formed by meiosis and metonymy, allegory and alliteration, chiasmus, synecdoche, verisimilitude, and so on.

An emergent aphorism might materialize in the midst of misty, undulating apparitions and translucent mixtures getting wrung through opposing perlocutions of figure and modality (what?) — *volatile* amalgams that, when first conceived, evoke palpable, yet strewn and shapeless intuitions of profound understanding. Then a mastery of composition and every power of improvisation at the artist's disposal must be exactly invoked, to discern whether this vision might be brought into immediate communion with the unyielding enigma of human intelligence, or is just

another figment (trite and thoroughly subjective), one glimpse and it's gone forever, one more misty memory.

The pivotal labor of the aphorism writer is to uncover new figures of speech, or new juxtapositions of meaning, mode, mood, and meter, which convey seemingly immeasurable realizations concisely and with pronounced effect. Communication of this nature entails a particularly judicious and efficient use of language. Ideally, an incisive narrative engenders a series of distinct images, erupting magnificently into being at the frontiers of the mind, near the harrowing abyss of utter incoherency — so to speak. In the beginning, these images could be sparked by a simple simile or a stunningly apt metaphor. A thousand pictures launched with a single word — that is the ultimate goal of the aphorism writer.

The foreboding edge of experience, if fairly captured and reduced to language, can produce fantastically unintended discoveries wrapped in compounding ironies, elegant consistencies, and prolific resonance. The aphorism may disarm the reader with subtle, or perhaps jarring changes of mood and subject, or the author reveals enduring predicaments, which allow familiar and receptive frames of mind, so that reader and author engage effortlessly, unaffectedly, and with

uncommon depth and intimacy. But then the reader may be led blithely along a winding path, only to be left alone, at the critical juncture, to fend in solitude.¹

As far as *figure reflects vision and form follows figure* (ethic), aphoristic work might complement more intricate *frames of validity* (aesthetic). To dig for aphorisms is *to try one's knowledge* of the most elusive percepts and inexplicable recurrences (epistemic).

And then brick by brick, layer upon layer, aphoristic work attains a smoking mass that is encompassed, insofar as it is *delimited* by scrupulous depictions of pure creativity and unfettered spontaneity (a nebulous mirror for a dimensionless cosmos), through an enabling, organic process (the synapses, brainwaves and symmetries of outlying ideas and correlative concepts), by which the work becomes organic in itself, as a systemic embodiment, the "whole," subsumes its parts. The writer's shadow dissolves into such finely transposed rhetoric, and where we surmise no clear sight nor sense of a restrictive, autonomous authorship, the reader may find, from the depths of a perfected aphorism, that time and circumstance grow increasingly immaterial. That is, subject, reader, author, and aphorism become virtually nondistinguishable.

1. Oden, T.C., ed., *Parables of Kierkegaard* (Princeton Univ. Press, 1978), pp. viii-xii.



Creative Obsession demonstrates that aphoristic forms can be as richly varied as people's noses, although in modern English, the "aphorism" is one more tightly defined and impressive-sounding noun that would have worked better as an adjective. Blooms of nuanced impressions and promising premonitions (for example, the "*aporistic*" potential of *aphoristic* prose) fade quickly into overused and quasi-meaningless words (words that attract lots of synonyms), simply because we talk too much. These days, "aphorism" usually signifies pithy, philosophical proverbs (or quips, adages, epigrams, witticisms, etc.) such as, "A winner never quits, and a quitter never wins."

A poignant proverb may be aphoristic, and at some point, a proverb is more properly termed an *apothegm*. In my view, the apothegm is a kind of aphorism. It is an extremely brief aphorism. However, apothegms are often less evocative philosophically, if not saccharine and insipid, and even the niftiest ditties will seldom exhibit the final refinements of fully integrated prose. Most semi-apothegmicals get embedded in drama-starved creations, while overly ambitious apothegms frequently conceal bizarre tautologies and *non sequiturs*. In the

annals and catacombs of cultivated language, profound and discrete apothegms are exceedingly rare.

The *apologue*, like the apothegm, is a kind of aphorism. It is an aphoristic *fable*, and a timeless, flashy fable is *The Tortoise and the Hare*. But it would be garish to re-infuse that famously familiar story with pilfered piles of swag and bags of blinding bling, so that it might mimic an apologue. It is truly difficult, in an age of undying fictions, to illuminate elegant facets of the apologue. The sketches are invariably sappy, easily dated, or too long. The allegory is typically transparent, and seamless textures may belie subtle contrivances.

The standard aphorism, if there is such a thing, is an aphoristic *abstract* (all vignette and *no twaddle*). It is made from densely worded, highly cohesive prose that precisely stuffs the spaces displaced by the efficient, protolinguistic crystallization of our most wildly evasive ideas. It is neither an apothegm nor an apologue, even though many standard aphorisms will exude traces of the apothegm and the apologue.

That's it. That's all the useful labeling around here. And thousands of aphoristic forms remain undiscovered. *They will be revealed*, perhaps, by our unquenched passions and the inexorable tides of meticulous and *effective* methods of art.

I may lack deference to, but hopefully not respect for my native language, and so I conveniently (*not* definitively?) refer to these scattered compositions as “aphorisms,” and I try to distinguish the forms of aphorisms, which are derived from the art of speech called rhetoric, from the countless forms of expression derived from that other art of speech called poetry.

CREATIVE OBSESSION
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Second Edition

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CREATIVE OBSESSION is an *apomary*, a fragmented fusion of *aphorisms*, *apothegms* and *apologues*, which depicts a “boiling pot” of philosophy with astonishing succinctness.

The fervent protagonist of *Creative Obsession* is Homer Dogg, “a hardcore traveler, an honest scholar, and an infatuated artist.” The apomary spans Homer Dogg’s fleeting, peripatetic life, while unearthing a deep-rooted connect- edness of *aesthetic*, *epistemic*, and *ethic* thinking. *Creative Obsession* celebrates “creative people of all stripes, who live and work passionately, resiliently, and with their eyes wide open.” It portrays *philosophic life in broad daylight* for “the firstborn of the Third Millennium.”

“Homer Dogg says in ten sentences (sometimes less)
what others don’t say in a whole book.”

—F. W. NIETZSCHE

“A literary, aporistic and, if you ask me, successful experi- ment in harnessing the broad powers of abductive logic.”

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In just fifty-six eclectic segments (and a revealing after- word), *Creative Obsession* presents a glistening mosaic of a wide-open, un-universal, *neo-philosophic* landscape.

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