
ISIC Entrance Exam August 2011

Three Attitudes to Life

As a human being you have the choice of three basic attitudes toward life. You may approach life with the philosophy of the vegetable, in which case your life will consist in being born, eating, drinking, sleeping, maturing, mating, growing old, and dying. Of human vegetables there is no end, and theirs is a calm contentment undisturbed by the problems of this world. They require neither books nor teaching, since vegetation is the be-all and end-all of the human vegetable's life. The same Providence that protects puppy dogs and earthworms watches over their destiny and provides their simple wants in life. They vegetate at the lowest level consistent with humanity and as they never read books, we need not disturb their placid existences by useless instruction in the art of living.

The second basic attitude is to look at life as if it were a business. A great many so-called successful men and women believe that life is a business, and they arrange their conduct and behavior accordingly. If you believe that life is a business, your first question of life, naturally is, "What do I get out of it?" and your first reaction to any new experience is, "How much is it worth for me?" In a world based on this attitude, happiness becomes a matter of successful competition, and this is the method of choice in the animal world. The stronger eats the weaker. The fittest, in point of personal power, survives at the expense of the weaker. Life becomes a matter of aggressive offense and successful defense. Every animal shifts for himself, and living alternates between savage victory and abject defeat.

The great majority of human beings today look at life as if it were a business. Their basic philosophy is one of aggressive competition and personal efficiency. Our skyscrapers, our 'rush hours', our super-motor-cars, and 'high-pressure' salesmanship are all the results of personal competition. So also are slavery, war, conflict, despotism, serfdom, and the exploitation of smaller nations by their more powerful neighbors. The belief that might is right is the direct result of a strictly business attitude toward life. The aggressive egoism of the "might is right" school leads to a variety of nervous breakdowns which preclude happiness, and anyone who has watched the struggle for personal prestige and power in a family or in a business office knows how disastrous the business attitude is in the private lives of men and women. And anyone who has read the history of the world must likewise be impressed with the failure of the "What do we get out of it?" school national politics.

We are too prone to overlook the terrific costs of the wrecks of the competitive system to individual and to State. The competitive system in life does not kill outright, as in the animal world, where its success is greater. Applied to human life it maims, it cripples, it makes dependent. It breeds crime, perversion and insanity, the costs of which weigh heavily on victor and victim alike. Any attitude toward life which has such an impressive list of failures to its credit, in the history of the world, is hardly likely to lead to individual happiness when

applied to the lives of individuals. If we would be happy in being human, we must look at our lives neither with the placid eyes of the human vegetable nor with the greedy eyes of the aggressive, self-seeking businessman.

The third attitude toward life is the approach of the artist. Here the underlying philosophy is "What can I put into it"? The basic relation of the individual to his fellow-men, is one of co-operation and common sense. If we have recourse to history again as a test of the validity of this attitude, we find as confirmation of this point of view that history remembers best those who have contributed most richly to the welfare of their fellow-men. And when we examine the lives of these great contributors we find that their genius was never one of aggressive, self-seeking, but one of contribution to the welfare of their fellows. The more we investigate and the more we learn about living, the more we become convinced that the artistic attitude is the only one which is consistent with human happiness.

W. Bran Wolfe, *How to Be Happy Though Human, in Modern English Readings* (Alan Gilchrist, ed. Longman, 1973).

Questions

I. Referring back to the text, answer the following questions in your own words :

1. What are the three types of attitudes to life? Explain what each one consists of.
2. Which attitude best describes you? Explain and justify

II. Say in your own words what the writer means by the following:

1. "Philosophy of the vegetable"
2. "Method of choice in the animal world"
3. "Aggressive egoism"
4. "What do I get out of it?"

III. Put the verbs in brackets into the correct form, making ALL the necessary changes:

1. We (to take) an exam now.
2. When I (to receive) the results of the Baccalaureate, I (to be) very happy.
3. My friend and I (to go) to the gym every Sunday.
4. I (to live) in Rabat since 2000.
5. We would have been late if we (not leave) immediately.

IV. Rewrite the following sentences, using the appropriate connector from the list, and making ALL the necessary changes:

[Although, unless, neither...nor, therefore, in order to]

1. Please remind me to mail the letter. If you do not, I will forget.
2. She is very ill. She came to class.
3. Ali does not like pizza. Omar does not like pizza.
4. You worked very hard. You passed all your exams.
5. She is saving money. She wants to go to France.

V. Writing: Explain why you would like to be a journalist/reporter (150 words). Pay attention to paragraph and sentence structure, punctuation, and verb tenses.