

I'm finally turning life around



PAUL
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I'm excited. No, more than excited. I'm amped up; I'm revved; I'm stoked. I'm excitable like I've just done four lines of coke, and for once that isn't the reason I'm so jazzed. The new semester is here, and this year it's going to be different.

I can feel it—no, more than that: I can taste it. I'm going to get back in shape, get better grades, and just clean up my act. *This is the semester.* Sure, I've said that before, but I've got it all planned out.

First, no more oversleeping. None of that. It's a year for change, and I'm changing. I'm not going to wake up with just enough time to get to school. I'm not going to skip breakfasts or showers anymore. No way. I'm going to get up early, have time for a good breakfast, a decent shower, and then a little bit of studying—plus some sit ups because I'm going to wake up *that* early, and time won't be problem. Of course, I'm not going to do this in the first month. I mean, you don't really need to get to class *right* on time at the beginning of the semester, and there's nothing to study this early anyway. I'm also not going to do it right when I get back from Reading Week because I'll need some time to adjust coming back from vacation. And it isn't that



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FILTH WIZARD NO MORE! This year I triumph over my self-imposed mediocrity.

feasible when I'm doing midterms or finals or term papers. But the rest of the semester, damn am I going to get an early start.

Also, no more cramming. I don't need to cram if I study beforehand. And there's always plenty of time to study at night and on the weekends. And that's what I'm going to do. I'm going to make sure to study like a fiend then. But I can't start too early on weeknights. I mean, I'll have just gotten back from school, so I'll need to unwind, check Facebook, and watch a *Simpsons* rerun or two.

But right after that, studying is the name of the game—unless of course there's something really good on TV

or I rent a movie or my friends are playing *Halo* online. But other than that, I'll totally be studying. Especially on the weekends. Not too early, though, because I'll need to sleep in after having been out drinking the night before. And not too late, either, because I need to party with my boys. But for the midday, when I'm not eating, making plans, or catching just a little bit more TV, I'm studying.

Yep, this semester is sure going to be a different one for me. With a plan to keep me on track and resolve to complement it, I'm going to be a different university student, no doubt about it. I can taste it—no, more than that: I can *feel* it.

Ignoring death won't alter the inevitable

Only by addressing the fear of our own mortality can we hope to overcome it



SARAH
MALIK

As a child, I watched two deaths in quick succession: my mother's from leukemia and that of a childhood friend, who was only seven, from paint poisoning. The swiftness and ugliness of their deaths made my parents' old answer to my incessant toddler question, "what is the purpose of life?"—to share toys with friends and be good to people—hollow and useless.

Their response was glib and pithy, comforting in its simplicity, but it also seemed to me a desperate clutch at a buoy, an attempt to avoid something that seemed to be sucking at us constantly: our deaths, inevitable, looming. In light of the two deaths, it became clear to me that being good to others—that desperate and hasty moral injunction—was a hope that perhaps if we joined ourselves together in this massive, dark, foaming sea, we could forget, and thus escape, death. Now that I reflect on it, that simple answer seems to be a nouveau-Marxist opiate, throwing a shroud on reality rather than illuminating it.

I've been caught in the midst of an existential crisis lately, asking myself that same question which I haven't asked since I was a child. What is the purpose of life? The queer disconnection from time and the dislocation from reality brought on by exams amplifies that gnawing at the truth. It's

as if I want to dunk my head in water and see the nature of the vortex gnashing at my ankles underneath. Yet this question is one that we are encouraged not to ask. Which seems stupid. People will inevitably respond: the purpose of life is different for a Papa New Guinea tribesman and a university student—it's relative. But, ultimately, we all die, so the varied responses based on the life conditions of different people must face the same single horror. The Papa New Guinea tribesman will die; the university student will die.

Now instead of the question of death asserting predominance in our consciousness as it did many centuries ago, death has been exiled; the problems of life now sway our thought.

Everything in our lives is designed to mask the one thing that's absolutely certain and inevitable and at the same time what's most uncertain—we could die tomorrow; we could die in an accident or from a snake bite—and uncontrollable. We enter into relationships, and symbolically we hold hands with another in the ocean that is life; we tread the water with the combined strength of two, and so the action that we must all universally perform, staying afloat, becomes more facile, even further unnoticeable.

Now, instead of the question of death asserting predominance in our consciousness as it did many centuries ago, death has been exiled; the problems of life now sway our thought. Something strange has happened: degrees and grades and men and women and Gucci shoes are "worth dying for" and hence are imbued with the death instinct, trivializing actual death, postponing it, banishing it from our thought.

I'm reminded of Victor Frankenstein creating his monster out of the dissecting room and the slaughterhouse. What he created was life, but it only brought death—of Victor's loved ones and, ultimately, his own. I can't help but feel that our reliance on all that is ultimately unimportant and has been exalted brings, by exiling death, some new kind of death: the death of something in us, of a realization that ought to be there to make our lives meaningful. In this way, though living, there's something of the charnel in us.

When my friend died at the hospital two days after exposure to his freshly painted house, he—that mocking, laughing, spaghetti-loving boy—had disappeared without sharing his toys with me. It didn't matter. What struck me even then, when he waved at me through the hospital window while I sat on the bench outside, was that he knew he was dying, and in the face of that, everything became irrelevant. This isn't, and wasn't for him, a nihilistic realization; rather, it was an acceptance of the knowledge that he had come to an end, as we will all.

We ought to respect our life and, gathering courage, look under the water to face death, alone.

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