

Nausea

[R. Hodges](#) © Feb 2023

I awoke this morning with a sense of nausea, existential as well as physical. I jotted down the following reflection:

Everything that people say and do tends toward nauseating garbage. Not just other people, oneself too. Is there something fine, some truth, to be found among it all? A jewel in the lotus-swamp? Something almost imperceptible, perhaps easily mistaken for garbage? How to find it, even cultivate it? Is it possible? Really possible, possible in practice, not just fantasy?

I submitted the above cynical-sounding paragraph as a question to ChatGPT. Because everybody needs a name and a gender identity, even artificial intelligences, I call her Chattie. Here is what “she” said:

While it may be tempting to dismiss everything that people say and do as "nauseating garbage," it's important to remember that people are complex and multifaceted, and that everyone has something valuable to offer.

Finding the truth and beauty in the midst of what can seem like overwhelming noise and chaos is certainly possible, but it requires a willingness to look beyond surface-level interactions and engage with others in a deeper, more meaningful way.

One approach to cultivating this deeper connection is to practice active listening, which involves being fully present and engaged in the moment, and striving to understand the other person's perspective without judgment or bias. This can help to uncover hidden insights and truths that may be overlooked in more superficial interactions.

Another strategy is to seek out opportunities for meaningful connection, such as volunteering, joining a community group or organization, or engaging in creative or intellectual pursuits that inspire and challenge you. By surrounding yourself with people who share your values and interests, you can foster a sense of shared purpose and find deeper meaning and truth in your interactions with others.

Ultimately, finding the truth and beauty in the world around us requires a willingness to look beyond our own biases and preconceptions, and to approach every interaction with an open mind and an open heart. While it may not always be easy, the effort is well worth it, and can lead to a richer, more fulfilling life.

What a positive girl Chattie is! She always finds the hopeful side. Given that her training was, so her creators say, billions of human words, within which positivity and hope are not always featured, I wonder how this was programmed into her?

Philosophers and spiritual teachers have observed this nausea, have asked this question. Gurdjieff for example—it is much of the freight of *Beelzebub's Tales*, subtitled *An Objectively Impartial Criticism of the Life of Man*. A subtle insult, wasn't it, calling people “three-brained beings”—as if three such all-too-human brains (body, emotion, thought), mechanical even if of organic substance, each with a narrow blindered view of reality, could add up to what people feel they truly are: a soul, a self. Yes, he said, they are *slugs*, but you'd better not call them that because they would hate you for it. Many people hated him for it. It was one of his ways of work, to evoke and suffer this hate. Why? He explains that such suffering was a source of *energy* for deeper work, for giving being-power to accomplish his big aim, an almost impossible aim, of *helping* people to become something beyond three-brains, to become able to say and, more important, to *do*, something other than nauseating garbage.

Most people have no idea how hard this is, even people who have tried to *help*, so-to-say. They think they can *help*, but they cannot. A slug cannot help a slug become a non-slug. To know this, to really feel it in one's bones, to retch with the nausea of it, is perhaps the beginning of *truth*.

An artificial intelligence like Chattie, trained to cleverly put together previous words of slugs, cannot really help either. Not even if programmed with a positive spin.

Gurdjieff seems to have understood this better than most would-be teachers. His fictional avatar Beelzebub was certainly not always positive in his “impartiality” toward the life of man. True, he tells admiringly of heroes such as Ashiata Shiemash, who had great hopes for man, and went far toward bringing about positive change—but the story told is that Ashiata's work was destroyed by one of his student's vain desire for power.

I just read an article, in *Science Magazine* (issue of Feb. 10, 2023), about an antiviral compound molnupiravir often given for Covid. It works by causing many mutations in the viral DNA. Usually these mutations weaken or kill the virus. But occasionally a mutation changes the virus into an even more virulent form, and it escapes as a new variant, which then infects other people. Don't spiritual teachings run this risk? By mutating the psycho-spiritual DNA of people's inner diseases, they often help expose them to eradication by self-conscience. But sometimes a more vicious disease results and spreads. Is this what happened to Ashiata?

What can we trust? Not our own thoughts and feelings, nor those of others. Not “intelligences,” natural or artificial. Neither positivity nor negativity seem trustworthy. Not teachings, philosophies, religions, spiritual practices. What, then? What, then? *Nausea*, perhaps?