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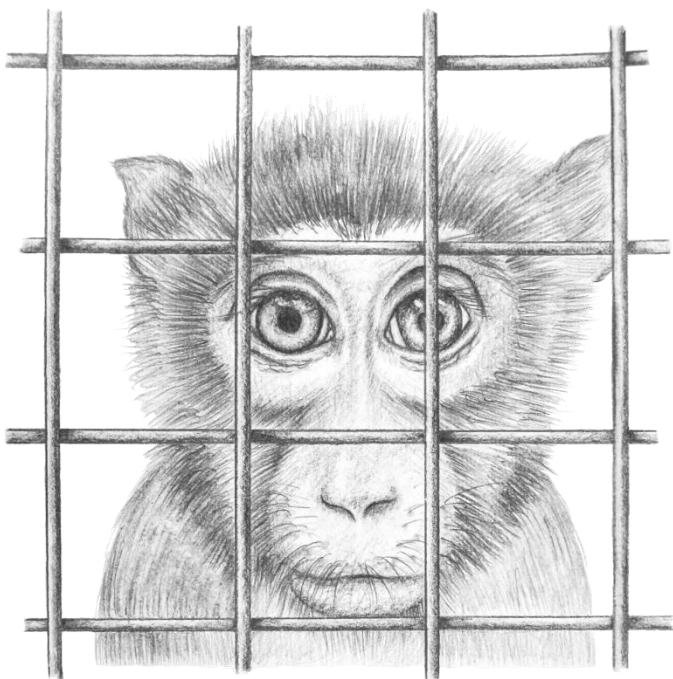
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Jeremy

Why Bother?

"At the end of every hard-earned day people find some reason to believe."

We are the fruit from the flower from the tree. We start underripe, become ripe, soften, wrinkle then rot and smell. We have a shelf-life – a sweet one. I hereby take you on a journey inside of yourself to look at the meaning of life question.

Well before wet dreams and before I had any need to wet my face to shave, I was taken aback by a thing people were saying, namely, life is pointless, life has no meaning. How could this be? We are encouraged to study hard at school, build a life, build businesses, or get a good job and enjoy life. Around us I see people's excitement; I see their hopes and aspirations. There is so much to do, so much to look forward to. We hope to change the world for the better. We can make something of ourselves. We have a lifetime of opportunities ahead. How can you possibly say that life is pointless. I agree, life can't be pointless. Can it? I know we all die in the end. We may die at a much younger age than we may have liked, but still, there life is full of possibilities. Great possibilities.

Whatever you feel and think right now, whether you think life is full of meaning and purpose, whether you believe that life is a test, whether you have found your individual aim or not, I will say to you one thing, we are without a doubt driven to do things. You want to do things. Why? Because you have certain drives built into you. These drives are deep rooted inside all of us. These drives are in everyone, including your next-door neighbour, and the famous people and the rich people and the poor people and you, whoever you are.

Most people don't bother to think much beyond what they need to get done today. We are driven, distracted, and occupied. Some are so preoccupied that they rarely consider anything more than what needs to be done to pay the bills and save for the next holiday. Washing to hang out and other drudgery that can be left until tomorrow. Today is another fine day, another day older, another day wiser. Today we can party. Maybe we even get to do something that we have been waiting a long time for.

No matter how dreary our daily routines are, or how exciting life can be, I wanted to get to the heart of the wretched question, what is the meaning of life? There must be an answer to this. Perhaps there is something that makes us think that there is a meaning to life. I have asked many people what they think. I have read books, watched films, and looked at what is available on the subject. Each answer that I came across though seems to be what

I would call fudged, hazy, never complete, or consistent. There has to be something better than what I have been shown so far.

Why *do* we bother? It is obvious that we may want to survive. We may want to travel, have fun, and explore. We may want to make more money and have a better life. There can be a strong desire to have children. We may wish to master things. We endeavour to learn and succeed. We can strive for power. We may aim to keep ourselves healthy and happy. We can hope for better. Some wise ones simply plod on with no thought as to why. Others spend an age pondering what it is all for.

Whatever we seek, it all comes down to three words. Three drives. Three things in each of us. Every one of us. These three things provide us the impetus to get up and do. These three things are at the heart of all our motives. We use these three drives all day, every day. When you fully understand them, you will see your life in an entirely different way.

I will go through these drives one by one, giving you everyday examples to help you get to grips with what I am saying. Nothing too taxing as such, but you need to spend a while thinking about them. To really appreciate the importance of this you must watch them in action in your own head. This is a revolutionary way of looking at humans and their desires. Using the tree analogy, we can look at any leaf and follow a path down to the trunk via the twigs and branches. I use this ubiquitous tree example for it has branches and smaller twigs that fan out in all directions. Sex branches out in untold directions. The same sex drive produces untold sexual practices. You are driven by sex like the next person but what you get up to during sex differs substantially. It is the same fundamental striving to explore sex but with huge variation. Sex itself is underpinned by more basic drives. Things that make it satisfying and will us to explore it.

Those with a lower sex drive will have some other activity that stands in place of it. For what you get from sexual liaisons someone else may get equal pleasure from eating a bar of chocolate. Chocolate may indeed be better than sex for some. It hits the same spots. It satisfies the same core drives.

These drives rarely work in isolation, they are intertwined with each other. When you appreciate the effect of these drives you begin to see them at work in every aspect of our lives. You begin to understand why you did what you did and maybe why you reacted in a certain way at certain times. You will understand your mistakes and see why you succeeded. Everything changes when you understand the drives. Things begin to make sense.

Our drives are a vital component of us. They act as a layer, a special layer that sits between our biology and psychology. When

you appreciate the workings of this layer, you can see how it influences all aspects of our psychology. These drives act on us from birth until death. We are born, as you well know. We develop. We grow, we learn and survive. One way or another we end at the end regardless of what we do in between. Some achieve more than others, but they die too. Some of us search for meaning. Ironically, this search stems from these drives.

This understanding of these drives will be fruitful to all. You may have half-known about them already. Now you have a chance to get to understand them fully. They say knowledge is power. It is and sometimes more than that. I am sure many of you will have said to yourself, "If only I had known that when I was younger". There are things we find out and things we never find out. We die not knowing. This doesn't matter. Not at all - in the grand scheme of things. Luck, chance, and fortune can alter what we discover. We can gain awareness. I am not talking about anything deep or complex necessarily. It can be simple things, ordinary things.

Knowing certain things enables us to do, to try, to explore in different places. Had we known about these things before, then our life would be very different. I didn't realise she fancied me. I didn't know they were looking for someone for that job. I didn't realise that place existed. I didn't know that could be done. Lots of things that we are aware of or not. It only matters if you find out later. It can be galling if you find out too late.

Let's begin. Let's look at those drives. Let's see them in action. Let's see the affect they have on our day to day lives.

Why, what, who, when, where, can, and how. All these have something in common. They are questioning. We are asking. We want to find out. We want to discover. What is that? Who made this? When is dinner? Can this be used for ...? How do I get there? Endless questions. When we wake up, many of us will ask ourselves what day it is and look at a clock to see what time it is. We read the news to find out what is happening. We want to know if we have any messages. When we notice something move, we want to work out what it is. We notice changes and want to know why something has changed. Who changed it? When was it changed? What is touching me? What is making that noise? Who sung that song? What time does the shop close? What is for lunch?

Curiosity may have killed the cat, but curiosity is life. No curiosity - no will to live. What is the best way to spoil someone's enjoyment of a film? Tell them how it ends. Take away their suspense. We are glued to the screen and watch as we have the desire to know what happens. We are inclined to throw a book away, part way through when we no longer care how the story evolves. We all are well aware of what curiosity is, however, few

realise that it is entrenched in everything we do. We use curiosity to discover new places. We use it in science to solve huge problems. We use it to explore. We use it though for menial everyday tasks too. Curiosity is far wider than we imagine. It is not solely for large scale investigations. Some describe people as being curious. We are all curious. We are just curious about different things.

Is the water in the kettle boiled yet? Why did that bridge collapse? These are rather different curiosities, but they use the same curiosity mechanism. The only difference between wondering about the water boiling or the bridge collapsing is the number of neurons involved in your head. Some curiosities will call on hundreds of times as many neurons as others. It only matters how important it is to you, how much you personally care. Aunt Mable is having an affair. At her age? Some want to know who with and what was behind it. Those that call this kind of thing mindless gossip will show less curiosity. Many of us have a wish to know what is happening between people. This wish is comparable in importance to you as another's desire to investigate why people are mysteriously falling ill. One person's desire to solve a problem in science is matched by someone else's desire to solve a crossword puzzle. A gap in our knowledge is a gap in our knowledge. Ultimately neurons get rearranged and new links formed. How that impacts the world seems to be more significant, but we care about our own neurons the most. Our neurons, our actions, our bubble, our world in our head that is powered by curiosity. I must keep pointing out that this curiosity mechanism is at work all day, every day. These two questions; where did I put my pen? and where is the enemy lurking? use the same curiosity process.

Mysteries play into the hands of our innate curiosity. Where did that person vanish to? Were they killed or could they be still alive somewhere? What happened and who was responsible? We search and search for answers and may not let it go until we solve the mystery. Looking for lost treasure is another example. Looking for a sunken ship or hoard of silverware. Some have set up treasure hunts. They chose a place to bury a golden object then published some vague clues to indicate its whereabouts. This has sent people crazy. So crazy that they offered to pay ten times its value to be told where it is.

Look how we fret when we are dumped. We want an explanation. We consider all the possibilities. Was it something we said, how we behaved or something about us that led to that fateful decision? Do we need to change? What was the real reason for the upset? What are they not telling us? We want to know as our mind will not rest. We seek closure. We want to find out who did

something, who stole something or who was really responsible for an accident. We crave setting the record straight in our heads. Our curiosity drives this. Once the record has been set straight and we get to the truth, we are no longer plagued by the curiosity. During a large investigation we use curiosity to summon clues. We speculate how each clue can impact the investigation. We consider what clues there may be using curiosity to solve the bigger curiosity. We are curious to know what clues will help and what we can find to rule things out. Curiosity can bug us intently and relentlessly. Have you ever looked in every draw and cupboard for something? Hours wasted. You sit down and another potential place of where it could be pops into your mind.

Curiosity can be a huge factor in the inspiration to travel, especially to new places. Once the decision is made to go, we need to know what time we must arrive at the airport. Wanting to know that departure time might not seem like it is a curiosity thing, but I say it is. As is the thinking about whether the flight will be busy and will it be on time. Will it be a smooth flight or turbulent? How am I going to get to the hotel? Who will I meet? Even if it is a destination we have been to before we brood over whether they still serve the same food as last time? That fruit looks 'new', I haven't seen anything quite like that before, I wonder what it tastes like? How does the texture compare to other similar fruits? On it goes. What is this stuck on my seat? There will be a small number of large curiosities and thousands of much smaller ones, micro curiosities. What concerts, what events what new and exciting things are there to see. Which button do I press to get the lift door to shut?

I have presented a random selection of different things we may or may not be interested in. All are driven by our curiosity. Was my writing worth the effort? Were all those keystrokes in vain? If you can stop right now and think about what you are to do for the rest of the day, how many curiosities can you come up with? Why do you want a career change, why do you want a new partner, why do you do what you do? A vast proportion of every action, everything you do has a basis in curiosity. There is of course more to it than that. There are two other drives that come into play also.

One thing is quite apparent; we do not all care about the same things. There are things you care about a lot, which other people do not care much about at all. You care far more about this; they care far more about that. We each have the same curiosity mechanism, but it is directed in different ways. Some may wonder who won the football match, what was the score, who scored and how the team managed to pull it off. Others have absolutely no interest in who scored, who won or whether the football matched

was even played or not. We are curious about other things instead. Curiosity is fundamental to who we are. Lose your curiosity and you lose the will to live. If you no longer care what is going to happen in the future, your future, the future of your children, the future of your favourite football team or what progress man will make then you shrivel up.

We think of life as being deep and meaningful. We search for the reasons for our existence. We look for something extraordinary and never realise how simple we are. We are nothing other than a body with a head atop that has a vast conglomeration of links with gaps in them. These gaps produce curiosity. We have a gap in our knowledge and we want to fill it. That goes for academic items, simple facts, or methods of doing something. We may wish to know how something works or how we could make it work better. Rearranging links and sorting out the gaps. Each day we refine the links and fill more and more gaps. Some gaps appear fleetingly whilst others form a huge hole with countless links surrounding it. When you think, you run along lines of thought and encounter a gap. That stops us in our tracks sometimes. That spoils the ride. When we fill the gap, it feels good. A bit like repairing a pothole in the road.

Gap filling

We can fill a pothole with mud, tarmac, stones, water, or mince pies. It fills the gap in the road regardless. We can fill our minds with murky, muddy, flaky, beguiling things too. We can have a head full of nonsense or a heap of things that make little sense. We had a gap, now it is filled, for now, and that stops us worrying about it. Our curiosity needs satiating. We glean bits of information and build a bank of knowledge and create a set of beliefs. Curiosity can be satiated with anything that seems to fit what we already understand. The car sinks into the hole if it is not filled with something solid. People question our beliefs and challenge us about what we know. We will debate and argue with them and if we have a weakness in our argument, we begin to realise that there is what you might call, room for improvement in what have filled our mind with. A strong belief is bound by lots of links tied to it. A belief is held in place by lots of other information, much of which is often quite correct. You believe because of this, because of that, because of many things. The truth, the veracity, the credibility of a belief may be left wanting, but the gap is filled and that is that. Lots of cars or one big lorry will upset any badly filled pothole. Lots of people, or one very persuasive individual can do the equivalent with our beliefs. These people create a new gap for your curiosity to deal with.

We can satisfy our curiosity to some extent by watching the television and getting engrossed in a film. However, this method

of learning has limits. A bunch of cooks each made a fine plate of food. The audience watching at home were invited to judge which they thought was the best. Surely something is amiss here. We have been asked to select the winning plate of food without getting to taste it. Curiosity is not simply facts and figures. Curiosity is more than just images. Curiosity involves feeling things, tasting things and being somewhere. Seeing someone getting annoyed in a film is nowhere near the same as being face to face with an angry person. Being bitten by a mosquito hurts. I have fired a variety of assault rifles and a heavy machine gun. No film that I have watched gets close to the sensation of using these weapons. The noise is deafening. The hillock in front appeared to be obliterated by the stream of bullets. It needs to be seen for oneself to appreciate how staggering it was. This implies that we need to experience a lot first-hand, to get a true understanding of things. Certain memories have a deep emotional attachment.

A berry can be described as sweet and astringent, but it is not until you put one in your mouth that your curiosity is really satisfied. Curiosity is sated with experience. Stories told to us are no match for first-hand experience. Words don't have the same impact. Hence, we try in vain to advise our children to no avail. They carry on, going against our wisdom regardless. They have to get burnt themselves to some extent. We learn by making mistakes, hopefully the lessons are not too damaging.

Gaps in our knowledge bug us. As do children by asking endless questions hoping that we can provide answers. As a parent we can fill their heads with semi-truths, lies, and sometimes reasonably accurate details. A child wants to know how a steering wheel turns the wheels on the ground. Each time they see a car they are reminded of this mystery. They ask you and as you have not got a clue you will make something up. This is fine until they realise years later that they have been duped. You wanted some peace and quiet and the answer you gave them filled the gap in their head. Your memory is not a truth machine. It is your truth. When things don't add up, when there seems to be a contradiction, you re-examine what you know. So many triggers can shift your thoughts back to mysteries that we have. One thought leads to another. Any image, any sound, any word relating to a car could bring our curiosity revolving the steering wheel, back into our attention. These puzzles get set aside until something reminds you again.

Gaps can't be filled if we have doubts about the accuracy of what we have been told. However, they can be filled with truths that appeared credible. Once filled there is often no reason to revisit them. We stop questioning. That is until something gives us a

reason to re-examine things. We hold lots of personal truths that suffice for us, it is our truths. Data is data, nothing more.

Take a look out of your window. You will be drawn towards things that are moving. This is a micro-curiosity. A bird landing, a cat stalking or a car passing by. You want to identify what it is. If it is something that interests you, you will examine it more. The more you care, the more you investigate. We get wrapped up in thousands of micro-curiosities every day. Smells, touches, tastes as well as visual stimuli all draw us away from what we are paying attention to. Curiosity can keep us safe and out of danger. Unsettling noises may make us run away. Curiosity has a far wider scope than you first imagine. Curiosity is in every what, why, where etc that comes your way. Is that my cat or the cat from next door? What is it up to? Where has it been?

It is amazing that children can watch the same cartoon avidly every day for a whole week. Then do the same jigsaw puzzle over and over. Nevertheless, boredom does set in. Without boredom we would get stuck. We would repeat the same actions until we keel over. The rewards for running along the same pathway get less and less each time. We might try completing that jigsaw puzzle upside down or in a faster time to boost the exhilaration but sooner or later the thrill tends to fade. Boredom manifests itself when we have little of interest to do or are doing something with minimal interest over and over. Change and variation is needed to avert boredom. Boredom tempers curiosity. Sometimes we need to work through it. We want the bigger rewards that are found by overcoming the boredom. We may have to search long lists or process a vast amount of research to find an answer. We can force ourselves to overcome the power of boredom, but it wills us to have a break and do something else.

I was fortunate to have been brought up in a household where we were able to explore a wide range of ideas. This can be some compensation for being made to do untold inane things. Some people like things done the way they want them done. You are constantly being scolded - for trying other ways of doing something, even though it achieves the same result. In many family units, open discussion is stymied. There is only one way of thinking. One doctrine. One set of books that matter above all else. We sometimes call this mind



washing, but it better thought of as mind awash. Full to the brim of things related to one point of view. Curiosity is quashed or directed towards one segment of life only. All other segments are ignored. How can you explore places that you don't know exist? When you do uncover other paths, you find them blocked and forbidden by those in control.

People stuck at home with no company, no rewarding conversations; loneliness. No chance of finding things out that interests them. Areas of our curiosity nagging and no way of dealing with it. No opportunity to discuss ideas and see if other people agree. We crave the chance to count. We crave continuity. What I mean by continuity is that we don't want to keep having to start the same conversation over and over with different people. We value being able to delve deeper with those that already understand our background. Curiosity is a huge web but treading the same ground every time induces boredom.

If you are thinking 'so what', I know curiosity is a powerful force, then firstly tell me what the other two drives are. Put this book down and write them down. Secondly, if you are saying 'so what' then you have failed to understand the gravity of this revelation. Completely failed. Busy people won't spend much time looking at what the motives were for their actions. The very reason you turned your head to stare at something, to glance at something, to examine something, was because of the curiosity machine that you were born with. We can play curiosity tricks. We can tell half a story, we can hint at something, we can do many things that play on the curiosity drive. We draw people in via their inquisitiveness with simple tricks. When at a restaurant table, pick up a menu stand and look at the underside of it. Make an "Ahh" facial expression then put it back down. It won't be long before someone else picks it up too, to see what you were looking at.

Paths

New roads are built to bypass busy sections. New roads create shorter smoother routes. It is nice to sail down these new roads skirting the jams and traffic headaches. Curiosity works like this. You learn new things thereby creating a new way of doing something, bypassing the muddle and confusion that you once had. New information enables you to get what you want done. Easier, better, more accurately. When these new links are formed it feels good. And we are rewarded by this change. The improved flow is rewarding for a while. Curiosity is linked with reward. We get a physiological high when those gaps in our knowledge are filled. Curiosity drives us in part to solve a problem and when that problem is solved, we get a chemical reward released inside us.

Change is vital to a happy existence. Variety is the spice of life. This saying cannot be worded any better. People have devised

eight different ways to cook a potato. Anything to mix things up a bit. There are plenty of way to create a change, though a day full of routine will provide enough change for most. We are at our lowest when we can't revel in the freedom to change what we are doing. Not being able to go out, not having the choice to do so is the most dispiriting. Reward needs change. Many will do roughly the same set of things but maybe with different people or in different places. Then we have mastery. When we pursue something intently to get better. Being more capable is change. Boredom can set in when we hit our limits. Those large leaps of progress at the start become tiny improvements as mastery sets in. We exhaust all the variations and diminishing curiosity is to be found within that field.

I have asked many people what they think drives them. Survival often comes up. Most do want to survive. Signs read 'do not jump during rush hour' in some busy stations. It is somewhat standard-selfish to show annoyance about being inconvenienced by those that have taken their own life. A train that is delayed brings about some frustration. People want to get home. Only when the railway workers announce that they are looking for the head do they quieten down a bit. We do indeed want to survive, but most want to thrive too. We are not focusing everything on just making it to the next day intact. We want things in life.

Some remarkable tales of people overcoming adversity are to be found that talk to us about survival. A farmer got his hand caught in his machinery and left his portable telephone in the driving cab. With no painkillers and a blunt knife, he hacked his hand off to get out of the fix. That is no mean feat. Others in similar situations have given up. One person managed to survive in a boat for many weeks drifting about in the currents. They used their bare hands to prise a nail out of the wood and used it to fish. Simply overcoming the odds is reward enough. How can I survive? I want to continue with my life, me. It is for me though, as selfish as that sounds. Selfishness is to be commended when it is used to endure the struggle. To prosper, to make headway, to achieve is the name of the game rather than simply survive. We place too much stock on the idea that we are simply doing what it takes to survive. The adrenalin pumps from time to time when there is a need to escape danger. Our survival instinct often kicks in, but nevertheless there is more to it than that. We think about all the things ahead of us that we want to do. That motivate us. We have hopes and aspirations. We strive for more. The escape from boredom. Staying alive at all costs is unappealing if the rest of your life will be limited, restrained and dull.

If we are asking what drives us and survival doesn't sum it up well, then what about procreation? This puts those that can't have

children or don't want children in an awkward position. Besides, a drive is there from birth until we depart. We don't stop striving when we pass childbearing age. Far from it. Many begin their life in earnest at that point. It may be true that we have a grandparent role, but most of our children become sufficiently independent to look after themselves and their children. We may have a use in procreation as a helpful sister, brother, or grandparent, but each of these people have their own agenda. They want to do things for themselves too. Usually, they want to do things that they want with only a few dedicating their whole life to child rearing. In many cases as grandparents, it is interfering rather than assisting. To get to the point, I can tell you that conception is a side effect of sex, largely accidental, unintentional, semi-planned-at-best. The more sex we as a species have, the more offspring we create. So long as enough people are having children the population will expand, though at this point in history it seems the population is expanding beyond sensible limits. If you choose not to have children, you can still have a very fulfilling rewarding life. Whether children we have were planned or not, the basic drives come to the fore. We want to know everything we can about the process and what it entails. We have children for our pleasure. It gives us a selfish sense of being needed. It is rewarding when we see the fruits of our labour. We get a lot from seeing them progress. We revel in their success. We enjoy seeing them getting into university or doing well in the workplace. My child, me, us, we did it. The love we share of our family means a lot to us personally. Some can love a child irrespective of how devious they have become. There is a love for very nasty people. Again, that is centred on our own being. Selfishness need not be seen as evil, wicked or something to spurn. Selfishness enables us to procreate. It enables us to offer the maximum to our children.

When I talk about selfishness and a host of other seemingly negative ideas, we can be inclined to switch off. However, from negative ideas come untold positives - if you reframe things and look hard enough. One example I use to transform a negative into a positive relates to our striving to pass on our genes. Many cherish the idea of living on via our blood relations. Spreading your genes far and wide may seem a nice idea, more so if you think your genes are special. Yet the idea of passing on of your genes is a fantasy. You could be royalty, super beautiful, super fit, super-duper but no matter who you are, your genes get diluted rather quickly. For a start any immediate offspring is only half yours. The other half will be your spouses. Your grandchildren divide it into a quarter. By ten generations it is watered down to one part in over a thousand. It is less of a chain and more of a murky pool that you emerge from and potentially contribute to. Your legacy, your goofiness, ginger, gregarious gene segment that

emerge in your children or skips generations and rears its head later down the line has an exaggerated importance. And the positive? When we acknowledge that our genetic code disperses quite quickly, we are more receptive to fostering - more at ease with bringing up a child that is not half ours. We say our genes, but we didn't make them, we were handed them via a random mixing in the womb. These genes that we made no effort to create are split in half at the first conception. Diluting rapidly, halving into irrelevance generation by generation. The blood line belongs to mythology. It is a delusion.

Sexual attraction brings us together. It is desirable, compelling, and exciting. However, nature has no grand plan. We are set up to bond and bond we do. Our libido differs. Some have sex on the forefront of their mind night and day. For others it is of little interest. Sex can motivate us into action, that is for sure. Sex is not the base drive, reward is. Sex brings us reward. The release is one example of how change is so pleasurable. A different sensation, a different thing to do which releases endorphins in the mind as well as fluids elsewhere. Nature's trick is to give us a real sense of accomplishment during and after sexual activity. All that foreplay, fighting and battling to get a relatively brief rush. It can make us proud though, for a long time after too. Memories and experience endure. Then we want more. The curiosity calls us to consider taking it further. Other people, other angles of attack, other places, and other boundaries to push. How else can I live this up further, we ask? Curiosity really is in everything we do. Curiosity and reward feed one another.

If curiosity has different scales, different levels and some curiosities linger for far longer than others, what about reward? We can experience a small change and feel a slight reward or complete something big to feel a much bigger reward. Reward when we fill our bellies. Reward when we empty our bowels. Reward when we accomplish something. Reward when we tell people things. Lots of rewards, some bigger than others. Thinking about rewards, reward after reward that are released throughout the day, we can answer a serious question. When our life is threatened by someone, why are we so scared of dying? Rewards are chemical compounds. They are manufactured inside us and set to work. Rewards are addictive. We are addicted to life itself.

If we die, we will leave unfinished business, things that we want to do and discover. Partially filled gaps in our understanding and holes in our knowledge. That unfinished business could be science related, or in the religious arena, or things we want to see come to fruition. For some it could be nothing other than wanting to know how our family fares. I like to stress that the level of importance matters only to the individual. We care about

ourselves the most, we always have and always will. We care about what happens to us, we care about what we are doing, what we are working on. That is what matters to us the most, not what others are doing. Unless of course someone is doing something that will affect us, or help us, or change things for us. You care about the rewards you are getting; you care about the things you are curious about and you are always, always, always acting in a selfish manner. You don't want to die because of the selfish wish to see more, do more, feel more and finish more.

The reward mechanism is a bio-chemical system hence it can be played with directly. We can do this with drugs and electrical stimulus. Rats have been wired to a machine that gives them a dose of internal reward. They press a button to trigger it and trigger it they do. Endlessly. They will ignore sexual partners in the vicinity, ignore food, ignore everything around them and keep pressing. People have become hooked on drugs and follow a similar behaviour. Instant reward that is as addictive as we are to the addiction to life. The chemical process is so similar it is hard to ignore. We are more of a machine than we like to admit. We humans, those rats need a novel distraction to get them off the drugs. A more exciting environment helps considerably. Rats get bored with the other rats in the enclosure. Put a new rat in and it finds it wants to mate with it instantly. That variety is the spice of life thing - change, is powerful.

Rewards are found during and after talking with one another. Face to face works best when one can gauge reactions through body language. The more the other listens the better it is. We can be the least selfish when listening attentively to what people have to say. The most rude-selfish are those that talk a lot and care nothing for what you have to say. As for curiosity, that is evident when we care to find out about what others are doing or what they have to say. We are curious about their opinion. The rewards gleaned from talking to someone else has a curious feature. In many cases it does not matter who we tell. The most important thing is whether they are paying sufficient attention or not. It can be anyone that listens. It is almost as if we are talking to ourselves to some extent. We want to unburden our thoughts, desires, and woes. We make friends and so long as it appears that your friend likes you too, that is fine. They could be fooling you but that doesn't matter until you discover the truth. This is the first example I give of the ignorance paradox.

What do people say to me when I tell them that mothers can't help being anything but selfish? "I suppose so." Labelling a mother as selfish doesn't seem fair, but mothers have no choice. If they want to lactate, produce milk to breastfeed, they have to eat and drink themselves. They must look after themselves first and foremost. For a mother to look after someone else, namely the baby she can't avoid being selfish. Both the mother and the baby win when the mother has her needs met. They win from the selfishness of the mother. Looking after yourself can't be a bad thing. Can you begrudge a mother for making an effort to take essential vitamins and eating well? It is all good for her and her family. The mother eats and drinks for herself in principle thereby enabling her to feed the child.



Selfishness is something we try to avoid. Yet we can't avoid being so. The way you view selfishness is going to change. I will demonstrate that selfishness is something to behold. Selfishness gives us the motivation to help. Selfishness can lead to co-operation with others. Some will do everything for themselves, but they miss out. They don't get the rewards from being kind and generous.

Being generous can be a wonderful thing. It is not quite as it seems though. Consider this balmy tangle. The women give the best portions, the best slices, the most food to the men. The women were being kind, considerate and generous. The men get considered first and foremost. Men took precedence over the women. Why? Well, if the men are not fed well, they can't hunt so well. If they can't hunt so well, they bring back less food for them and the women. They bring back less for all. So, to what extent are the women considering their own survival and wellbeing by being so generous.

Either way

I was waiting in a grimy station for, you guessed it, a train. A beggar had taken up residence there. She approached people one by one. Most ignored her. I gave her some food. Did I feel better for doing that? A little bit. It did stop her from bothering me and made her move on to the next person. Giving makes us feel less guilty. You are selfish for ignoring them. You are selfish for

wanting them to move along. Whatever the case, no matter what you do it might seem that you can't win. There is a special form of selfishness involved with giving. You feel better inside for helping. One way or another it tends to have some impact on you as well as the recipient of your charity. Sometimes the impact is not terribly great. Giving them a little gets them gone and stops them from pestering you anymore. It helps them a bit. You both get something from it. We can find ourselves doing this kind of thing automatically. We stop paying much attention to it. Do not be disillusioned, the power of selfishness is amazing. There is an incredible force at work, and it has the potential to make life very good for all.

A fine, super fine husband had an accident. On life support was he for some months. His mind was damaged beyond belief. Only a small part left intact. The doctors had come to a stark conclusion. Life support was to end. The wife on the other hand had different ideas. As the hospital was no longer prepared to nurse him, she decided that she would nurse him instead. She had him transported home and managed for a year. In all that time only one murmur was witnessed. Maybe gene therapy will advance in time to bring this person back to his former self. Wishful thinking. Unrealistic. Every day, feeding, watering, washing, and dealing with the ablutions. It was a long year. Real commitment. Eventually she realised that it was hopeless and could not sustain it any longer. He was put to rest. This story was told around a table with some seven others present. I said to the wife "you did that for *you*, not him". The others sitting at that table began squirming in their seats and remained silent. In truth this is what she had come close to concluding too. She was appreciative that I confirmed her suspicions. It helped. She would have been the one to take the glory. It would have been magnificent to be vindicated, to show the world that she held firm and did the impossible. She stayed the course, she did it. Having a fully functioning husband again would be nice too, for her.

Some children need twenty-four-hour care. This takes its toll on the parents. It can be difficult to summon the courage to take a weekend break from it. A trip to a health spa maybe. We feel bad for having a rest. A little guilt and sense that you are not giving it our all. However, when you come back from the retreat you are refreshed and can provide better care. Once again, you need to look after yourself in order to look after others. Any charity work you commit to is not sustained when you burn out.

I scratch your back and you scratch mine. Then they don't. You do something for someone, and they don't reciprocate. You may feel like a bit of a sucker. Many monkeys are seen removing bits and pieces, ticks, mites, and debris from the hard-to-reach parts of

another's fur. Sometimes they take it in turns and help one another in this manner. However, something else is at play. Bonding. You do this kind of thing for a friend, partner, or family member. There will be suckers, but maybe they are not really suckers after all. Maybe the bonding is more important. Maybe they feel better for helping. Yes, we can do something for others for nothing other than the internal reward we get from it. This concept throws dynamite into the argument that there is mathematical logic to all of this. People put numerical values on giving and receiving. Then they come to dreadful conclusions. How do you put a number on the feel-good factor surrounding helping? You can't.

At school your friend has forgotten their lunchbox. You offer half of what you have. They don't pay you for it. They don't bring in double the next day. They may never repay the favour. They may become a better friend though. Both of you gain. You may get a badge of generosity. Your image may improve. You may not tell anyone about it. You don't want to gain recognition for your kindness. You just keep it between the two of you and feel that it is the right thing to do. You see their gratitude, and this is something which most find pleasing enough. You don't have any guilt for watching them go hungry. No feeling bad afterwards. However, one way or another you gained something, albeit something small at times, from sharing.

A lady slipped and managed to get her leg stuck in between the carriage and the railway platform. The train guard, along with twenty other people all pushed together to release this hapless victim. They all worked together in harmony to free her. What did they gain? I suppose they can't go anywhere with her there and it helped them get on with their journey. That wasn't really on their minds. They wanted to solve the problem. The group effort was rewarded collectively and individually - inside each of their heads. They felt chuffed and pleased. They also had a great anecdote to share. They were part of something. Similar stories are abound with crowds lifting buses and lorries to free someone trapped underneath. Lots of people working together for no real tangible gain for themselves, except that what is realised in their minds. A chemical release is real and present when we do such things.

A have heard many stories where there is a fast-instant reaction to events unfolding. A child steps into the road and someone leans across and grabs them, pulling them back. We have prior knowledge of the dangers and need no time to consider what needs to be done. It stems from earlier experiences where we learn to look after one and another. We understand how good it makes us feel. The type of person we become is rooted in what

we have done and learnt in the past. We have no need to consider the right thing to do in all circumstances. We act based on the rewards that we have felt in the past. Our selfish instinct to do good becomes ingrained in us.

A bunch of drunken youths stopped at a takeaway restaurant to fill their bellies before heading home. A camera operator zoomed in on them and watched as one of them attempted to straighten a metal bicycle rack. It appeared to have been nudged over by a car. The first one was unable to budge it, despite being quite burly. Another lad had a go and failed. Then the third who had finally got his meal order was going to show them how it is done. The look of smugness, self-congratulation and top of the pecking order feeling was not forthcoming. They all failed. So, like all troublesome jobs they combined their strength. Together they managed to do it and then walked off. They all felt good for overcoming the challenge of putting something right, upright. It was an innocuous thing that bonded the group a little more. They all gained from making their community less unkempt. We make the world a better place for others, and it gives the individual some satisfaction that they were part of it.

We call people selfish when they refuse to share, when they are not keen to help and generally not considering what others might like. Those that do consider what someone else wants or needs, are being co-considerationally selfish. We can do something for someone else and get an internal reward. This is co-considerational selfishness. Two people gain, you and the recipient of the help. You can give a gift to someone, they get the item, and you get the pleasure from your generosity. Pure selfishness is when we do something where we are the only beneficiary. We also cooperate by doing things for the mutual benefit of many. We may pool resources and split the profits, so each gain together.

I want to point out a subtle but significant difference between mutualism and co-considerational selfishness. Suppose a market stall is selling donuts in packs of twelve. Now someone asks you if you wouldn't mind going half each on a pack. They only want six donuts. If you too, only wanted six, then you club together. You pay for the twelve between you and split the pack taking six each. This is mutualism. However, if you are not terribly keen on any donuts, but decide to help out by clubbing in anyway, then it becomes co-considerational selfishness. We feel good that we made somebody's else's life easier. You did it to assist and be obliging. You see their appreciation. You become a better person in that moment. Mutualism is cold and logical, co-considerational selfishness is emotional and with feeling. Sometimes our actions can be a fusion of the two. Mutualism is pooling resources to

make it better for all. Co-considerational selfishness would be pooling to help the less well off, to help others, to assist where there is no desire for material gain.

It is virtually impossible to avoid some form of selfishness rearing its head in any interaction with others. Taking the trouble to listen makes people respect and like you more. You gain. Holding a ladder for someone, fetching something, providing directions somewhere, you name it, it makes us feel better for doing these things. Then there is the not feeling bad for not helping. That too is better for us. There will be times when the feel-good factor is muted. We become accustomed to behaving in a kind, nice, way. So accustomed that we stop paying attention to why we do things. We do recall instances when we felt a bit guilty and avoid things automatically. When we are decent, life runs smoothly. For us. It is always us, that is at the centre of all that we do. That may be disenchanting, not what we want to hear but, in many ways, it is a great thing. Selfishness is a powerful drive that is predominately beneficial for all. Selfishness is complex and multi-faceted. It is not confined to self-preservation, self-centeredness or being mean and inconsiderate. It is found in co-operation, assisting and generosity too.

A young child was spending their afternoon with some school friends and a bunch of elderly people. It was a scheme set up to bridge the generation gap. They were out in a large park for a long walk. One old lady got left behind. The child noticed that one was missing so she backtracked and looked for her. The joy on the lady's face was a sight to be seen when this child returned to find her. The child felt pleased for her efforts. She was however, wrapped up in a rounding up of the sheep game. She was curious to know where one of the ladies had gone. She felt great for showing care for someone else. She had a reward that no money could buy. The child did it in part to show care for others but also for her own personal satisfaction.

Lots of ladybirds hibernate around the windows. Every spring I send them on their merry way. I spend quite a while collecting them up and ousting them. I get some happiness from doing this. I help them, they make me a little more content. I have spent a lot of money buying land to rewild. It has cost me dear. However, it makes me seem less of a hypocrite and I feel less self-orientated. Selfishness whether co-considerational or not involves lots of factors. It is a two-part thing. You give back and simultaneously gain pride in yourself.

Altruism

Selfishness is a drive. A drive that we all have and one that we can't do without. It can be very selfish when we do harm to others. It can be co-operative. It can be such that we all gain in

equal measure. It can be a gain in kind. However, can it be for no gain whatsoever? To do something whereby you get nothing back at all is possible but doesn't happen very often. It is very rare. It is what we call, altruism. Donating eggs to another woman comes close. Donating a kidney comes close. Giving blood or sperm without receiving payment also approaches altruism. Dying to save the lives of others comes much closer.

Your last act, a desperate act can show altruism. A last act made by a few parents has been to shove a pushchair out of harm's way. An oncoming vehicle takes the parent out, but their quick thinking saves the child. Some parents have laid down on top of their child to shield them from a hail of bullets. The children have survived to ruminate about the tragedy. A soldier jumped on top of a grenade. This saved three other soldiers that were standing nearby. He threw his rucksack over it and laid on it. It was quick thinking. He survived too. Doing nothing would have meant they all died. I suspect he assumed the worst for himself though. These things happen very fast. It is hard to know what the true thinking behind these actions were at the time. Some have been shot. They know that they have seconds to live before the damage inflicted will fully disable them. They have then taken a last stance, discharging whatever weapon they have on hand to make their life seem a bit more worthwhile. This is the thing with altruism in its purest form. If it leads to your death, you won't be around to value the deed.

People may not mind admitting that they are not particularly altruistic, but balk at the idea of being called selfish. They were most likely scolded by their parents to stop being selfish. Share with your brother. Think of others, is what we are told. Yet when we think about what we have been doing today, who was it for? Who did you eat your lunch for? Who got what from all the things you have been involved with? You work to help an organisation and keep customers happy. Nevertheless, you pay close attention to the salary. You care about your involvement. You care about your progress. You help others so that a promotion is more forthcoming. Helping in the business benefits lots of people but you consider how it will help your career too.

When thinking about what drives people, many think money is the answer. Money is reward of course, but we can learn a lot from why people get involved with voluntary work. Here there is clearly no payment as reward. Instead, you gain from the experience, you gain from the feel-good factor of doing something great for others. It keeps boredom at bay for sure too. People can be financially motivated to find ways to increase productivity. However, there are many ways to make people feel valued and make their job seem worthwhile. Some companies

will do things for the community. Many will consider the life satisfaction of those working in an organisation. The places people want to work at are not always the ones offering the highest financial pay out. Money can motivate us for sure. There are a lot of things though, that we do, that have not got anything to do with money. We walk our dogs. We mow the lawn and tend to plants. We play games and talk to one another. Lots of things we do make us feel better for doing them. They have an effect on us, on our selfish desire to do, to be and to help. These three core drives have always been in us. We were still driven to thrive before money existed. These base drives are common to all. That means that they are found in every person no matter how young or how old we are.

All the higher-level drives are underpinned by these basic ones. The base drives are those that are applicable to all of us whereas the yearning for sex, money, fame, power, survival etc is more individual. One way to look at it is via the beauty of snowflakes. Each flake is unique. I say unique, you will get the odd near-identical ones in the same way as we have twins or doppelgangers. Each flake is built upon the same bonds between the water molecules. It has a complex name – intra molecular hydrogen bonding. The same bonds, same molecules but a myriad of different shapes. We have the same drives but have vastly different apparent aims. Your aim to write a bestselling book, produce the best film, gain a larger audience, change things, improve society, campaign, or make a dent in the ills of those in need, comes from these basic drives. As does the wish to make our house nicer or our clothes more appealing. As does our desire to jump from an aeroplane, dive in the ocean or spend a weekend hiking. As does making new friends and building relationships. As does masturbating, moulding clay, or meditating.

On the surface it appears kind and generous to give money away to others. Doing so might be applauded. However, there is a selfish aspect to it. We decide. We hold the power to decide where money in our possession goes. Giving money away is never truly altruistic. You get nearer to altruism when you give money to someone else to give away. Even then you feel that it was the right thing to do. You get the sanctification. You can share your wealth and get some feedback that way. If you didn't feel better when you give, would you give more, the same or a lot less? If you never felt any guilt, would you do as much as you do for others.

Selfishness is not a bad thing. It is pure genius. To think that we can be incredibly generous simply for a rush of chemistry in our minds. It is very clever. If you were to design a new animal species, would you include this feedback loop where the animal

feels good about helping others? This feedback loop is not the I help you; you help me in return. It is I help you and feel joy, feel more connected, more at peace with myself.

We may be driven to succeed, to become more experienced and masterful. There are untold drives. There are so many that I could not even begin to list them all. These are all however, powered by deeper drives such as our selfishness that sits at the very bottom. Base drives are ones that everyone feels. Base drives are at the heart of wanting more money, wanting to have sex, wanting to travel and learn new things.

You can have sex for your own gratification, for you alone. You can have sex whereby both parties get something from it. Hence, we consider ourselves and others too at the same time. You can have sex to appease a partner. Thus, it is for you, or for you and someone else, or it is for them but to stop you feeling guilty and keep the relationship alive – which you benefit from. So, it is selfish whatever way you look at it. Selfish in the pure sense or co-considerational selfishness at best. That is one base drive. The gratification, the satisfaction of sex, drives us to go and make it happen. It is rewarding. Reward is another base drive. There is also some exploration involved. Maybe we try with different people, in different places or in different positions. We try, we experiment and search for more. If you think back to your youth, did you spend nights alone imagining what it would be like to have sex? What does it entail? What would the sensual experience be like? And that is of course derived from curiosity – a base drive.

When I say we feel better when we help someone, it is due to a chemical release that floods our head. We can get this release after a long workout too. We can get this when we solve a problem. We feel it after accomplishing something. One way or another it requires some sort of work. The work may be physical or working to complete a mental challenge. Over the years I have met a lot of people that have stuck to working on menial tasks. Cleaners, road sweepers, factory jobs you name it. Some do suffer from boredom, but one thing is for sure, the work gives them a sense of accomplishment. Many people that collect rubbish on the roadside confess that the job is rather good. They have the camaraderie, the sense of purpose and of course the financial reward. Compare that to those that have spent most of their lives idle. No work leads to frustration and stress. Some can fill their time with meaningful objectives, but they never get the satisfaction that comes with the notion of providing for oneself. Many will do any job to support a family. Again, a rewarding facet of life.

Some work can be arduous and unfulfilling. We may glean some reward, but it leaves us feeling discontented. I liken this to the sex on the beach problem. Sex is usually very gratifying. However, when you get sand in your genitalia it gets sore very quickly. Sex on the beach is akin to an unpleasant job. Have sex on a bed with a view to the beach - change the job and it can be marvellous.

In the past we had places where animals were stored in tiny enclosures for humans to gaze at. These zoos provided the perfect breeding ground for boredom to set in. The animals had no real opportunity to make use of their curiosity. The rewards were minimal in part because all the food they needed was laid on for them. They rarely had to work for it. As for their selfish desires? They could not exercise much in the way of choice; thus, they didn't have a lot of opportunity to help or hinder. Their autonomy was taken from them. Take away the ability to harness the drives and it leads to despair. Some were seen rubbing themselves against the railings all day. There are proposals to create human zoos; the state gives people just about what they need to survive. It seems like a good idea, but people need work to get reward. The most selfish thing we can do, is to work so that others do not have to. The fortunate ones get to go out and build a career whilst their families are stifled by unrewarding inactivity. You get to solve problems whilst your dependants have the problem of having no problems to enjoy solving.

I went through a period where money was tight. I would mix beans and spaghetti together then add a sprinkling of pepper to reduce the blandness. As years went by my business grew and money came rolling in. It got to a point where it seemed like I was printing money. Easy money. Easy come easy go. On one holiday I felt like a gate crasher. I had this reward for what felt like minimal effort. Some people fall lucky and land a role that they didn't expect. They feel like they are at a party where someone had invited them in by mistake. It can be an odd feeling. Nevertheless, you soon find yourself working again to justify your presence.

Co-considerational selfishness entails helping others and many like the idea of helping the masses. They may scale the political ranks to get to be the one making the big decisions. Some will exploit their new found power by indulging in the benefits of high office. If you believe that most are there to help us and us alone, you could be living in false hope. They enjoy the process. They have the rewards. They do it as much for themselves as they do it for others. Most are purely selfish. Some do consider what is good for the people but very few sacrifice all what is good in their life to make improvements.

Being thanked for helping is important in this co-considerational selfish system. People will keep helping when they are simply thanked. They want the recognition. It is much harder to consider helping again when the effort you make is thrown back in your face. A nonchalant, begrudging "thanks" will not inspire people to repeat what they have done for you. Money can be provided as a form of thanks. However, the chemical reward is powerful. Making someone feel good for their accomplishments. Praising them and showing them your appreciation. Verbal recognition for people's efforts counts a lot. This type of repayment is nothing other than something going on in the head of the recipient. A change in flow.

If guilt is a minus, not having any guilt is at least zero. We can therefore do something to avoid that negative disposition. Guilt free is a plus. Whilst we interact with others, we have a physical body that seeks to maintain itself. It must care for itself to survive. It has a system of being rewarded for making the lives of others better. The mind rewards itself when it co-operates. We consider ourselves and others at the same time, albeit subconsciously or automatically on most occasions. It is endlessly, incessantly inquisitive. These drives are at work all the time. Having explained this to many people over the years, few see the implication. One asked if there is anything deeper! No there is nothing deeper for once you look beyond reward, curiosity, and the selfish system you have nothing but basic chemical biology. If you break a snowflake apart, you get water. The magic begins when oxygen and hydrogen come together to form water. It is then that the structure and properties of a snowflake emerge. Oxygen and hydrogen need to be bonded first, that is the deepest point of snowflake study. The drives form a bridge between biology and psychology. They are the deepest part of psychology.

It takes a while to see the connection between these drives and the meaning of life. Give it lots of thought and gradually you become aware of how your actions, decisions, and desires stem from these drives. The things you find compelled to do were related, one way or another, to a basic drive. From there you begin to realise that you are a driven entity. Everything you do, is to satisfy these drives. The drives provide meaning.

You wake in the morning and wonder about the day ahead. Where are my things? How much time have I got to get ready? A look out the window confirms your expectation about the weather. Each of you will have completely different lives, but the same things are making you do what you do.

Some may have no empathy for others whatsoever, these psychopathic types are super-selfish. Those that are empathetic get rewards hidden from a psychopath. A psychopath enjoys the

power and control they have over others, it fulfils their selfish requirements. You may be far removed from a psychopath but that does not mean you avoid being selfish. Not at all, for you may consider others by making breakfast for the whole family and then fill your own stomach for your own self-satisfaction. Whatever you want to make of all this, it is plain to see that it is a mighty clever manifestation that evolution and only evolution could devise. To think that you can be kept happy and content by a range of chemicals that are stashed waiting to be unleashed inside of you.

Is it not remarkable that your whole life revolves around making and moving links in your mind? Gaining knowledge, imparting wisdom on others. What we do has an effect on the world around us, but what happens inside us is the most important. Our emotions make things seem very real. They are derived from changes in the levels of adrenalin, oxytocin, dopamine, serotonin, and such like. A smooth flowing set of links organised by curiosity make our life seem straighter. We need to keep finding gaps and holes in our understanding. We need to keep finding ways to obtain reward. We must keep wanting to maintain ourselves else we wither and see no meaning in life.

I can only spoon feed you to a certain extent. To grasp the idea of core drives being at the heart of all that you do, you need to experiment. You need to think for yourself about yourself. Stop and think about what you are doing, what you are planning to do and establish what the reason is. Why feed the ducks? Why learn to cook a healthier meal? Isolate the curiosity first. Identify what you get from it. How does it change how you feel? Some rewards are on the micro scale and are short-lived whereas others put a big smile on your face.

These drives are indeed common to all of us in the same way we all depend on food. One could of course be kept alive with intravenous mechanisms. Nevertheless, we require fuel. Food is that fuel and what we consume differs. Some food is more gratifying than others. More rewarding. We eat of course for us, for me, unavoidably selfishly. The parallel between drives and food is this. We all eat, we all have the same basic drives, but the food differs, and the drives lead us in different directions.

The implications of identifying and appreciating what these drives do is most profound. We may look for a purpose, a meaning of life using, of course, curiosity. However, we are looking at it all wrong. It is these drives that give us purpose. Curiosity makes us ask the question and the question is answered in part by it. The drives instil us with belief. Hope is derived from these drives. The reward we will garner is alluring if what we hope manifests itself.

We seek ever greater rewards thinking it is mystical, yet it is simple chemistry in your head providing a divine sensation.

You can lie in bed until noon or spring out of it at the crack of dawn and no matter what you suggest it is these three drives that impel you. A sarcastic soul may say they got out of bed to empty their bladder. That too is rewarding and for your benefit. It is change and more comfortable – the pain now gone. At the end of each hard-earned day, we find some reason to find the will to soldier on. We want to know if we can get through this low period of reflection. We want to see if we too can make something of this life we have.

The complete understanding of these drives gives those with this knowledge a significant advantage over everyone else. It is the bedrock of all psychology. The drives lie at the root of all mental issues whether they are considered positive, negative, or neutral. It is also ironic that a psychologist will use curiosity to get to the bottom of the issue that their client has. They will get satisfaction - reward for solving the issue. Co-considerational selfishness is evident in the aspect of helping others.



A scientist is traditionally considered to be curious. They want the reward a new discovery brings. Whether it is for secret pride or to great acclaim it gives them gratification. They win too if the achievements turn out to be useful to others. Both the scientist and the benefactors of the new science reap from the spoils of any progress made. An advertising agency will tap into our curiosity first to get our attention. They will attempt to convince you that you have worked hard and deserve a reward. They can aim at your sense of self-worth and make you feel that you are important. Boredom accompanies curiosity hence we may elect to avoid treading the same path too often else people will fall by the wayside in our campaigns. How do we educate? We invoke a child's inquisitiveness. We give them a small token, perhaps a

little sticker on a chart as reward for the effort they put in. We make them feel guilty for not achieving good grades and celebrate success by boosting their self-esteem. The self avoids guilt and enjoys compliments. So, one can either make someone feel good about what they are doing or make them feel bad if they are not following the norm. We can threaten them with that guilt that comes from harming others. We can encourage good hygiene. A child learns how it keeps them healthy. It also stops them from being blamed for making others ill. They don't want to be the guilty one, at fault and feel terrible for their inconsideration. Most people are rather lazy.

Most will close the book and look at something else rather than switch off all distractions and start to examine themselves by themselves. Those that do, those that do for a good while, will see the power of what is brought to them here. The spectrum and degrees of these driving forces is vast.

Curiosity

- Quest - long drawn out with many twists and turns. (2)
- Investigation – Scrutinising, uncovering more information. (145)
- Report - gathering essential details and outlaying key points. (772)
- Crystallisation – from hazy ideas to a clear understanding. (1179)
- Brief defining - ending doubt about what something means. (8243)
- The fleeting 'what is that?', who, why, when, or how. (4477003)
- Your attention drawn to something you have noticed. (40201099)

Reward

- The feel-good excitement in your head.
- Being happy with the outcome and findings of the quest.
- Making notable headway with a goal.
- Feeling the change from a drug hit.
- A boost to your ego from helping or problem solving.
- Sensual interaction.
- Food, drink, rest, and play. Change.

Co-considerational selfishness to self-orientated selfishness

- Purely for you.
- Working where both gain, mutualism.
- Giving to others; rewarding when it is appreciated.
- Going out of your way to assist.
- Someone else's pain addressed - you have less guilt.
- Sacrificing something major - donating eggs, bone marrow or kidney.
- Pure altruism – your last fatal act.

I ask you this; does the appreciation of music give you an evolutionary advantage? What about tinkering with model railway lines. Or making a dolphin picture from an arrangement of sea shells? I ask these questions as some have this belief that all facets of humans and humanity has a reason. A reason for being there. That does not seem to be the case. Some things are incidental and serve no purpose, particularly in the primary role of procreation. If you were to suggest that non-heterosexual people also play a part in procreation, namely by helping mothers then you could be trying to make oddities fit where a fit is superfluous. There are enough mothers having more than two children that more than compensate for those that don't have any. There is no reason in many cases for things we do in terms of them having some kind of evolutionary benefit. Push aside the obsession of seeing the world through the lens of procreation and how animals thrive by evolving and adapting to the environment. Only some features of evolution are necessary. The rest are incidental.

Our curiosity may encourage us to try different fruits, nuts, and seemingly edible items. The more we try, the more options we have to call upon, thus enabling us to have a greater chance of surviving. A varied diet will also offer us the greatest chance of living healthy. Boredom helps us. Boredom of eating the same things all the time plays a part in enticing you to eat more variety. You try other things to alleviate that boredom. We seek different things to do because of boredom thereby expanding our knowledge and capabilities as a person.

The curiosity to explore led to the population expanding. We began to seek out new lands to invade. A grander type of curiosity than others for sure. A train has wheels, as do cars, bicycles, tractors, and shopping trolleys. The wheels provide a mechanism to roll. The wheel provides the same action no matter whether on a car, train, or trolley. Each wheel looks different, but they perform the same function. When you see curiosity in the same way as the wheel you will grasp what I am saying. The wheel rolls whereas the curiosity seeks to fill in gaps in your head.

That curiosity can power the panic we occasionally have when we want to know. I mean really want to know what we should do right now. Desperation, desperate for news, desperate for knowledge that a loved one is safe and well for example. Frantic, frantic headless chicken emulation. Curiosity, nonetheless, simply in overdrive.

Infants don't get far without calling on the co-considerational selfishness principle. Parents plus those in the community get fulfilment from nurturing and aiding the young. That obviously helps the next generation to transpire. An elder offers advice and

wisdom until they are put to sleep by an act of kindness/act of selfishness. However, I can't fathom any evolutionary advantage in helping a person reach 100. Medicating, feeding them, hoisting them in and out of bed and providing them with an hour a week of jovial entertainment. It is done to avoid guilt. It is done for our pleasure and out of respect. Looking after others is rewarding, but there is not always an evolutionary advantage type reward in what we do. There doesn't need to be one.

In all walks of life, we face battles of psychology. From self-confidence, caring about what others think. Through acceptance and dealing with rejection, to allowing love to take over. Resisting impulses and curating habits. Mastering things despite objections. Overcoming tiredness and boredom. Overcoming self-doubt. Getting through hard times and being capable of sharing joyful times. Battling guilt of the pleasure we are having - whilst others are struggling. Losing, failing, and things not going the way we want. Fear and trepidation of potential problems. Every game, every encounter, every decision will have a psychological element. If you delve a bit further, further than what you might normally do, you will see the philosophy as plain as day. In here you will find every-day, every-man philosophy to enjoy. It will assist in those numerous endless psychological battles, lots that you will be confronted with. So many mistakes and errors, delays and procrastinations revolve around a psychological war inside your head. You can do it beautifully when alone but not when others are watching, or when the stakes, the prize is higher. Philosophy underpins psychology. Learn philosophy and you will be great at dealing with anything in the psychology field.

You might be a little dismissive of these situations we live through each day. Does it really matter if I did this to avoid feeling guilty. Did they do it for some obscure personal gain. Is the nature of selfishness something worth worrying about? Who is bothered. How will this affect my life going forward, really. Most will fail to see it. Happiness, a gratifying satisfying time, enthralling excitement in life is easier to come by when you do get to grips with all of this. You will make better choices. You will live a life more suited to who you are. Your confidence will shoot up. Or you die in ignorance. There is a contrary thing to understand. You haven't experienced how good things can be so you have no understanding of what you are missing out on. An arduous job takes an hour. It is a job you often leave until absolutely necessary. However, a new tool comes along and now the job is quicker, simpler, more satisfying. You could have died not knowing that tool existed. If you find out late in life it doesn't matter as you will have reached that age anyway and there is nothing you can do about the past now.

Should

Some people sure think they have more decorum than others. They believe they are superior due to their better manners, especially table manners. We might be told to stop slurping our soup. Then we visit another country and discover that slurping is normal. Those that belch are giving an indication to the cook that the food is good. It is appreciated rather than frowned upon. In some households we are told to keep our elbows off the table, in others we must not speak until the meal is finished. It shows that we can't agree to any set standards. We might include that in the grace. Thank the lord that we don't have to abide by these ridiculous rules at every home we visit.

What we should and should not be doing, morals and ethics, creeps into our lives. It creeps in, in many ways. It is everywhere, even in books and films. Those that write them subtly offload their moral codes on to the audience. They are spreading their beliefs. They subconsciously alter what we consider to be right and wrong, good, and bad. Writers influence our opinions. This may or may not have been intentional, but it has an effect. The characters portrayed in the stories are used to nudge us to be like them in certain regards. Every story, every fable, every article that has been published contains coercion. The writers and authors of these stories attempt to get you to be like them. They perpetually suggest things, advise and prompt. Suggestions on what they think you should and should not be doing. The advice may suit you, the advice may be good for many, but it is their advice, and it is advice that stems from the way they see the world. It is how they want things to be.

People may not specifically use the should or ought word, instead they imply it. If I were you I would... Well, you are not me. That is not the way I want to do it. When you ask why? Some will be rather vague. They will tell you that is just the way things should be done. Ultimately it is simply the way they prefer things to be done. Their preference, their opinion, their habits.

Sometimes we pay for advice, we seek therapy. Advice can be essential to achieve certain objectives. People can help us. However, advice given when we did not ask for it can be rather annoying. Instead of advising people we can discuss someone's problem allowing them to work out a solution by themselves. People like to take credit for what they do. This credit provides the aura of being masterful. They can't take the credit if the person they are helping feels as though they have resolved the situation on their own.

There are plenty who think of themselves akin to football managers. Too old to play themselves now, but with the experience to hand out directives to players on the pitch. A football manager and the players will at least be sharing the same aim, that of winning the match. In other walks of life, we want to instil beliefs into anyone that will listen. Those that won't listen are pushed and prodded to take heed. Those that want everyone to take notice are the evangelists. I say, evangelism is a sin. We can keep the secrets of our 'success' to ourselves. Or we can publish details and make it available to those interested. Or we can actively push it, thereby spreading our message as far and wide as possible. We get the urge to promote our message a bit. Then a bit more because they think it has merit and soon after, the promotion becomes excessive, and we become an evangelist.

Evangelists revel in their perceived authority. They wag their finger at you. They do not care if they encroach on your freedoms. Lots of arm-twisting rhetoric is used to get us to abide by their commands. The most forceful win, but only until their reign comes to an end. Anyone can get caught up in evangelism of sorts. Some encourage us to protect the environment or be more charitable or abide to rules of a book. It will, however, be according to their interpretation, their point of view. None are ever whiter than white. All evangelists have an element of do as I say and not as I do.

There is a huge difference between saying you should do something full stop rather than, you should do something, **if**. You can tell people that they should take the blue road **if** they want to reach a particular place in the easiest quickest way possible. We may also inform those about to make this journey that the red route is the shortest and **if** they have time on their hands there is a



a country road option too. Some worry about getting stuck on the blue road. Some are keen to keep the mileage down to a minimum and care little for the traffic lights and congestion. It is much simpler to say, "take it from me the blue road is the quickest". Going through all the possible routes is time consuming. Aside from the brevity, we highlight what we ourselves tend to do and encourage others to do the same.

Note the irony. Telling people how we should be careful with the use of the should word. This book is full of ideas about life and attempts to steer clear of telling you what to do. I say attempts, as you will spot quite a few things that are not exactly impartial

or as balanced as they could be. It is an aim rather than anything else. Even saying that this is what we can do, can be read as what we ought to do.

Not every language has a should word in its vocabulary. The lack of the 'should' word might mean that people use body language instead, or a change in voice tone to hint at what someone should do. That or people either do something or they don't. A healthy discussion will involve people voicing their opinions. Lots will say what they think should be done. People will tell others what they think they ought to be doing, but how many are mindful of where their opinion comes from. The only principle that comes close to being accepted by all, is having the decency to listen to others. Yet people have a firm opinion on everything, believing they are doing everything right and expect others to follow suit.

Our parents can be adamant that doing something may be foolish. We go against the advice and find it to be the best thing ever. Not always, but sometimes we find our own way, running counter to what we are told is the best. However, an orderly household may need some rules laid out with clear boundaries set. Hence, we tell our children what they ought to be doing, when and how. We may dislike being told how we should do things but there are practical realities to consider. An employer will also feel at liberty to tell their workers how they should do things.

We could lead by example and let people decide for themselves whether to copy or not. It is hard though to stand aside whilst allowing others to learn to sink or swim. I have respect for people that give others the chance to make mistakes for themselves, letting them enjoy the rewards from learning, improving.

Every nation has its own set of laws, each with many flaws. No diktat is followed by everyone the world over. With so many contrary opinions abound, not everyone can be right. On balance, your method, your teachings are most likely to be representative of a minority when you take the population of the whole world into account. Yet some have the arrogance to think they are following the correct path. There may well be genuinely good reasons for doing what you do but you ignore genuinely good alternatives.

As for morality? Morality is nothing more than a personal construct. It is a list of our own opinions and personal preferences. Morality is opinion. It changes as we see more of the world. We add bits and become more flexible when we get to understand the deeper issues at stake. Our morality gains finesse over time with exceptions and exclusions added. In any moral maze we have those with differing opinions based on their moral code, their moral beliefs. There is no universal morality. People

attempt to formulate a moral framework that can be used by all. The first port of call is to find an abhorrent act that everyone agrees is morally reprehensible. From there they believe we can work inwards to set out a grand moral vision. They fail at the first step because they do not acknowledge that morality is, as said before, a personal construct. It is what we see, never what everyone sees, as right and wrong. Dropping a nuclear bomb on civilians is morally wrong. No, it is not. In your opinion it is wrong. Dropping such a bomb will invoke capitulation and an end to the war. This will save more lives overall, especially the lives of our troops. Thus, it is morally acceptable. No, it is not. In your opinion it is morally right.

Philosophy is everywhere

Philosophy has a poor image. People arguing inane senseless trite. That along with the sophisticated language associated with it and very few conclusions reached. Yet, all human activity has a philosophy behind it. The point, the purpose, the principles, the rules, the aims of sport, politics, clubs, businesses, and all societies are underpinned by a philosophy. One person asked a simple question, why can't I pick up the ball? What is stopping me? So, he picked up the ball and ran with it. This gave birth to a new game called rugby. We question, we come to some hazy conclusion, and then build principles around it. That questioning is what philosophers do. You too will undoubtedly question things. We are separated by the extent and depth of our questioning.

Nobody can provide definitive answers to some questions. In legal circles, the law may seem clear cut, but mitigating circumstances come into play. Is killing ever justified? Maybe if someone was about to kill you. Should you steal if it is the only way to stay alive? Saving a life can excuse theft in the minds of many. It leads us to think about cause and effect. The tenth person that breaks into a shop to steal lifesaving medicine gets clubbed to death by the store owner. Or the shop stops stocking the medicine. Or they let it be. Or we campaign to make drugs available for free to those most in need. It will always depend upon what our individual aims are. All answers contain an agenda. What we would do in some situations is not always the same as what we expect others to do.

Philosophy frames the arguments. Politicians use these philosophical arguments when formulating regulations taking the local environment into account. Take abortion as an example. Some feel strongly that it is wrong to interfere in any way. Even contraception should be forbidden. People claim that life ought to stay in the hands of nature once conception takes place, no matter how abled or disabled the resultant child might be.

Nobody ought to destroy a growing embryo. At the other end of the scale, we have those that see it as a right to do what we please until the baby is born, and the umbilical cord is cut.

Many a comedian has remarked, "I didn't ask to be born". You can't select your parents and you had no say in your arrival. But at what point did you become a person? Was it when you were born or when you were conceived? What about at the age of three? How do we decide when a human being has been created? Also, at what point are you pronounced dead. When your heart stops, or when rigor mortis fully sets in? If you lose your arms and legs, you still count as a person. What therefore defines a living human being? If a human is killed, we consider that to be murder, manslaughter at best.

Genetic strings are super tiny. A sperm enters a microscopic egg. You began from something very small and as an adult you are some twenty times bigger than what you were as a baby. Saying that a foetus is very small and is just a bunch of cells is no different to saying a baby is very small compared to a fully-grown adult. The size of the person has no relevance in this debate. An exact definition of a person is not easy to come by, but a body that metabolises using sugar and fats to derive energy, is a good starting point for deciding what is living.

In the womb, you begin as a parasite, sucking nutrients galore from your mother's reserves. There comes a critical point when you no longer need your mother. You will need someone to feed you, but not necessarily your mother in particular. Someone, anyone could look after you from then on. At the stage in the pregnancy when the child created no longer needs the mother to survive, a new human being is created. If a birth is induced and the child delivered could be nurtured by someone and nobody does so, then it becomes neglectful murder. The father, the grandparent, the charitable, someone could care for a child if the mother is incapable or has no wish to. If a child is sufficiently developed, developed enough that they would survive and lead a full life we could judge it as murder if we make no effort to feed and care for them.

The mother does not own the child simply because it is 'inside' their body. You could argue that the baby is attached to, rather than inside someone. Once it reaches the stage of viability it owns itself. In fact, the entity never belongs to anyone bar itself. It is a mystery as to why someone would be horrified if a five-year-old child was locked away and left to starve but not at all concerned that a new-born baby is dumped in a bucket and disposed of just because the umbilical cord was only recently cut.

One might describe a human being as an entity with the signature human genome, is metabolising and most importantly, is viable.

Someone that is viable need not be independent. When you get old, your body is certainly viable, but you may need a lot of assistance. You may require help getting out of bed, onto the loo and need spoon feeding like a child once again. Nevertheless, you can continue your human existence for many more years despite the burden you place on others.

A precise definition of what viability is, sadly not possible. We may revert to a judgment call made by people, people that can make mistakes. If a typical pregnancy is likely to create a viable child at around 24 weeks, we might err on the side of caution and declare abortions after 22 weeks as murderous. The proportion of viable entities increases as each week passes, with much more being viable after 22 weeks. However, advances in incubation and medical intervention will blur the issue further. If we accept that it is unbelievably difficult to make a stick exactly 1 metre long or make an object precisely 1kg, it is easier to be more relaxed about what person is deemed viable and who is not.

Viability at heart, is the heart, lungs and organs that are sufficiently formed and functioning to sustain life. We could say that removing the foetus from the womb at an early stage prior to it becoming viable is a termination of pregnancy. Letting it die or destroying it after this stage becomes murder by definition. We leave it to the policy makers to set the rules for what we can and can't do when intervening in the course of a pregnancy. The philosophy simply aids and potentially clarifies the issue.

The desire to live

In man's earlier history it was quite common to place a baby that didn't look right behind a bush to die. To do this simply because they have an extra toe, or some minor malformed part seems shocking in modern times. Having a cosmetic problem is one thing, but we worry about those that will never be able to look after themselves – never become independent. Can we afford to have a disproportionate number of individuals that will never reach independence? If the number of those needing twenty-four-hour care is too high, it would place an unsustainable strain on the rest. This can lead us to consider what the priorities are in our society. Ever greater numbers are reliant on artificial insemination. More opt for caesareans than in the past. All this makes us wonder what will happen in times of global crisis.

Some people stand out as rather different. We may label them as defective or handicapped, yet most appear to be perfectly happy. Sometimes happier than the average individual. They show a desire to live albeit through body language and gestures rather than the spoken word. The desire to live need not depend on our ability to attest to it. Life-changing events can make us think a lot about the desire to live. Our goals, desires and dreams enhance

our desire to live. Having a desire to live is everything. Personal, individual yet universal. However, this desire may wane occasionally. Some begin to have suicidal thoughts when life becomes a real struggle. Those that wish to end our lives may have good cause.

If you appreciate someone's desire to live, you might also be appreciative of someone's desire to die. When life becomes an absolute chore with each day getting progressively worse, this desire to live can evaporate. If the balance of pain and reward swings markedly towards the suffering end of the scale, then one may not want to tolerate it anymore. We can have less appetite for life when 23 hours of the day are grim. However, if there is any doubt then the ignorance paradox will imply that euthanasia is not the course to take.

If murder became legal the murder rate would rise for sure but having a right to life does not stop us killing one another. The laws stop some murders and take murderers off the streets. However, the majority are not hesitant about killing someone just because they are afraid of the repercussions or fearful of any punishment that comes after. We do not refrain from killing simply because we accept someone's right to live. Our ability to recognise that another person wants to live is paramount. We empathise and understand their desire to live. Understanding of our own desire to live helps too. We see the fear and distress on someone's face when they are threatened. We read the signals that indicate that someone wants to be left unharmed. Only the minority, the psychopaths don't care.

The idea of 'do unto others as you would have others do unto you' is a self-centred way of looking at things. Twisting and changing sayings can be rather wearisome but in this case, there is some merit in doing so. "Do unto others the way they want to be done unto." Our actions are often guided by what we think is right based on the choices we would make for ourselves. What you like does not always correspond to what other people like. You may love to have grapes brought to you when you are ill, other people may prefer something different. Maybe a banana or a big bar of chocolate. Have we properly consulted the other person to find out what they want? The notion goes far beyond selecting a fruit and reaches into serious decisions, but that example is an easy way to illustrate the principle. It is about respecting the desires of others rather than focusing on our own individual wants and wishes. Taking a few days off work to grieve might suit you, but for others they may benefit from the distraction and sense of purpose that work gives them. It all depends on the individual. Ask and listen, properly listen. Look at it from their position, their point of view.

Moderation

I have heard people mention balance so many times that it is almost too conspicuous to mention. Moderation may also seem plodding to the young and eager. However, there is a bravery in balance that gets overlooked. People egg us on to do more. Others try to slow us down. We find the balance that suits us personally. Maturity lends itself towards moderation.

We are not the same. Our level of endurance differs. The amount of pain we can tolerate is different. What can be a lot for some is not always a big deal to you. Hence attempting to emulate others can cause us grief. Hopefully we each gain enough confidence to stand our ground and not be too swayed by everyone else's idea of how much is enough.

How much exercise do we need to stay fit and healthy? Nobody really knows, but there are plenty of educated guesses. Some that promote more exercise can be found guilty of doing too much. They are the types found complaining of bad knees, bad backs, bad tendons, and bad tempers struggling to get a good night's sleep with ligaments that you never knew existed constantly flaring up.

Strong language gets people's attention. Strong language is used to get people to listen. This seduces people to shift away from moderate language. If we use overly strong language for relatively minor things, albeit disagreeable things, we have nothing left to use for serious instances. Coercive, controlling behaviour is not well suited to a spot of sarcasm and some unwanted advice. It suits someone who puts extreme restrictions on someone. A convoluted obscure apology mixed with complements is not twisted. Poisoning your pet to get back at the owner is twisted.

We think about balance in many areas of life including balancing our needs with the needs and wishes of others. Are we supposed to be proactive with a duty of care for people around us? Is there an unwritten obligation to look after others and care for their well-being? If so, how often are we supposed to check in on the sick and elderly to ensure they are fine? Who is included, who is outside of our zone of responsibility? There will always be more help wanted than what the world can provide.

A balanced varied diet, a bit of exercise, some vices, a little wayward behaviour from time to time, moderation. Moderation is based on compromises and pragmatism. We may even need to consider if we worry too much. And you bet the drives are there in all aspects of moderation. We can balance our selfishness and feel a multitude of rewards when we get that right. The exploration of the topic is curiosity at work.

Tolerance

If we live completely isolated on our own, far from anyone else, only the occasional visitor will remark upon the untidiness of your garden. When we live close to others, all bunched up, we become much more attuned to the tolerance problem. What is tolerable and what is not? We can decide to be tolerant of our neighbours when we appreciate how much lenience they give us too. Making noise from time to time is a case in point; people will accept some but will object to constant aggravation. Complaining about a party held next door is less warranted if twice a year rather than twice a week. Are we infringing on their life or are they being petty? Disputes arise. I have made the error of not listening to my own gut instinct and being influenced by seemingly respectable persons. I was soon wishing that I had stuck to my own tried and tested ways. People will use you to sort their problems and you end up in the firing line.

Your body is yours to deface, to work to death, to do what you like with. Paint your hair bright green if you feel the urge, for that is your business. It only becomes someone else's concern when we start endangering others, when our activities begin impacting upon their way of life. People go hiking in mid-winter and get into trouble. Ill equipped and inexperienced thus leading to a call upon others for a rescue. They are making use of the obligations of others to come to their aid. Your recklessness becomes someone else's problem. This is more of a political problem than anything else. People make mistakes and we need not see them die just because we don't want to bear the cost of getting them out of a fix. However, ignorance of the dangers is not an excuse that sits well with people that are in the line of fire.

We are the least happy when what people are doing jeopardises the safety of those not involved in that activity. In my view, under no account would it be acceptable to sacrifice a pedestrian to ensure the safety of those in a vehicle. Even if 50 are in said vehicle. They can be notified of the risks before embarking and choose to get on or not.

It will be nice to live by clear cut simple rules. One such rule might be; with tolerance in mind, don't do anything that infringes, upsets or endangers anybody else. However, people will interpret a rule in different ways, so people will ask for clarifications and examples. Exceptions will arise too, making the wording of the rule ever larger. From one sentence it soon expands to cover hundreds of pages or more. Some will think of the saying, "all rules are there to be broken", and we can never cater for the countless permutations of a wonderful life.

Life is a game

Life is a game of unfairness, with trials, pitfalls, and unexpected challenges. It can be rather good for some, and the game does allow for pockets of satisfaction and glee. The game has rules imposed on you whether you like them or not. Rules written down by governments and unwritten rules that society expects you to abide by. At no point do you get sat down and asked if you are happy to abide to these rules. We simply accept them. Some will undoubtedly try and get these rules changed. Whilst the rules of the land become ever more convoluted filling countless tomes, the rules of society flex with fashion. These unwritten rules are there to differentiate you from a pawn, patsy or someone purporting to be a pioneer.

The game of life appears at first to be a team game, but those that work with others act more in collusion than co-operation. We collude with others for group advantage paying most attention to the benefits any co-operation brings us personally. That selfish thing pervades all aspects of life. There are lots that will sacrifice you to help their position. They will throw you under a bus to gain a petty advantage.

In this game of life, we will be faced with many dilemmas, many troubles, and a multitude of challenges. We have to choose what to do at a given point in time with the information we have. Sometimes choice seems illusionary or elusive. It felt like we had a choice, but the options were limited by what others allow. You certainly didn't get a choice of where to play this game of life. Nor did you decide when. Nor do you get any say in what the starting stake was to be. You had no choice in how abled or disabled you were to be. Whatever cards you are dealt, you do get those choices that differentiate us. Certain choices separate the brave from the stupid, the astute from the acquiescent.

To avoid letting your life go by in a frustrating blur, one can choose their battles wisely. Is it worth the bother fighting every inconvenience, every irritation, every altercation? Time and time again we think about time with our internal clock slowing down the older we get. The slowing down of our internal clock makes time seem to pass quicker. A minute really seems like 50 seconds when we are old and grey, whereas if you ask a child to count a minute, they reach around 70 before that minute is up. We also notice that our experience of time sure changes when we are occupied. Distractions devour our allotted time.

All games have a start, a middle of sorts and come to an end. You know full well that your life will come to an end but that doesn't put you off playing. The end can come abruptly when you get

taken out and replaced. Your loss is someone else's gain. The substitute gets a moment to prove their worth.

What is a successful result you may ask. What counts as a victory? In a high-ranking sports event those awarded a gold medal seemed quite pleased with themselves. The ones that got silver were not. They appeared quite forlorn. They stood there dejected whilst others next to them were jumping for joy. The ones jumping in jubilation got bronze. Bronze seemed brilliant to them. You see, it matters to the individual where you come. A success need not be first place. Some have been 7-0 down in a football match and didn't give up. They were chuffed to see the final scoreboard at 7-1. They got a goal against a formidable team. They showed them something - a little that meant a lot.

When you are asked, "how do you see yourself in five years' time", we are expected to say that we will pass this and that, we will have a house or something, and our career will be advanced four squares on the game of life board. What we end up wanting is to be how we were five years prior. Younger, better looking, more hope, more belief and less tarnished. Time is an unnecessary evil. You get old regardless. Wishing this, wishing that is unhelpful. We must play with the hand we are dealt. Possibly bluffing, playing as if we had certain cards hoping that we don't get called out and go to a showdown. We can respond, react to events rather than wish for things to be different for us. If the market falls, then that is an opportunity. We can buy more. We could sell to buy back for less or wait it out rather than panic. The test of a game is to see how well you exploit the situation no matter how sour the cream has got.

Hope bedevils us. It feels so much better if there is some hope, some prospect of getting close to that beloved aim. To have any prospect of getting there, we need to see a path towards it. Hence why we say every long journey starts with first step. Once you take that step, hope carries us. I pray that it is the right step for you. A step towards what you truly want. Disappointment lurks and we eventually realise that we got it all wrong. What we truly want was quite different to what we thought we wanted in earlier life. Thus, a reckoning will cast a shadow over our days. You re-evaluate what you want. Turmoil can begin.

Half-time

Some will feel trapped. On the surface there is a lot to be thankful for. A reasonable job, a respectable house, a partner, and kids all with smiles on their faces. And a realisation that this is as good as it is going to get. Only downhill from now on. Less and less flirting. Would an affair liven things up? Maybe, but that will only provide a brief respite from this flat peak. Let's get rid of the flab anyway as nobody is going to want me like this. Let's do something

positive. That's the spirit. Go chase those higher forms of enlightenment.

You may be the one everyone leans on, and the one person people assume has everything sorted. Inside you are in turmoil. Prospects of promotion or expanding the business are slim and that wouldn't really help much anyway. In your formative years, you had lots all mapped out. You had plenty to look forward to. Now that most of your wishes have come to fruition you feel vacuous, empty, unimpressed. Has it come to this. The sum total of nil. Nothing outstanding, all average. Best of all nobody seems to give a damn. Too busy, too many trivial problems of their own. Oh well, poor you. You pity those in ill health, pity the poor buggers in a cardboard box under the highway. I am at least fortunate in most respects, we muse, but hollow inside. Some feel they have done everything right in life, adhered to the rulebooks and played it all straight. Yet it hasn't brought the bounty they expected. The cardinal rule is to keep advice to a minimum, so that leaves it to you to figure it out. You decide what to do from this point onwards. Ignoring that, I say, be selfish, yes be selfish. Do something for yourself for a change and all else can wait until you accept your irrelevance. Real freedom. Get back to what you are good at.

We can remind ourselves, frequently, that life is a game. It need not be taken overly seriously. However, people mete out pain on those that infringe on their rules. Physical violence, banishment, or demotion. At the very least doing something that dents your popularity. The thinking of a group is very forceful. You can have a go at visualising what you want. That constant thinking about the goal can provide an impetus to stop procrastinating and finding excuses. It can work. Sometimes.

Opinion

We can prove that some strategies produce better results than others. However, human life is not always about straightforward strategies. We might not want to win. We might want to let our opponent win to gain some other advantage, or to be friendly, or to give them hope, or to sucker them in for a big punch in another match. The winning strategy and tactics to use is not opinion, it is demonstratable, reliable, provable methodology. The game of life has strategies and tactics that prove to be best, for most. Nevertheless, the majority of game play is based on opinion. We will be bombarded by opinion. Our parents have theirs as do our teachers and of course the preachers. You will read something and believe it to be true. However, the writer wrote what they did based on opinion. It may be an opinion shared by many others, but it is still opinion. The best game players of the game of life understand opinion and its effects. You need to decide what

opinion to take on board and what to disregard. That choice of what opinion to utilise makes you what you are. Why do cats scatter and sheep bunch together? I tell you that sheep do not bunch together very often. They scatter across the fields grazing where they feel like grazing. They only bunch together when corralled. They may join the bunch so that they work more like a gang. They may use the safety in numbers principle or make a dash for it. The idea that people, too many people sometimes, behave like sheep is opinion. People do the same as what others are doing, not to be complicit but to act as a gang, ganging up on the few that want to go their own way. The more in the gang the more pressure they can apply on those not joining them. There is a saying about property and that is location, location, location. In the game of life, it is opinion, opinion, and opinion. If you are to take one thing from this chapter, remember the word opinion. People make opinion seem like fact. It rarely is. I know. When the entire planet lost its head, I knew that the whole world was pushing opinion not truth. I also know how deep-seated opinion can be. It can be seated deeply enough to destroys relationships. There is no logic nor rhyme or reason to it. It just is and it will test your resolve to breaking point and beyond.

Water boils at 100 degrees Celsius. Is that a fact or opinion. If you assume it is a scientific fact you may get caught out. Those boiling water to cook high up a mountain can fall very ill not realising that water boils at 70 degrees at certain altitudes. The belief that water freezes at zero degrees Celsius is false if it is salty. Scientific facts are only correct in precise circumstances. The more variables the more things lend themselves to opinion not fact.

Waste is using more than necessary. Logically it is not wasting food if you leave some to avoid over-eating and getting fat. The concept of waste is another opinion thing. I am sure people can have solid justifications for arguing that you are wasting what you have obtained. People will also judge you by how much time you seem to be wasting. But it is your time to use how you see fit. What seems like a waste of time to some, is in fact productive contemplation and relaxation. That has value. It can save time in the future. The reason we feel that we are wasting time is because we are not getting those chemical highs from the reward gleaned from progress. All lives are wasteful from the individual's perspective because every game of life comes to an end. Everyone could have done more. Achieved more in a shorter space of time. The less you waste the more reward your feel - up to a point. Time always reigns supreme in the game of life. We might get the estimation of how much time we are allotted quite wrong. We may die tomorrow. It doesn't matter if we die tomorrow though, for two reasons. Firstly, we are going to die at

some point anyway and secondly, we enjoy planning the future today regardless of how long we live.

The end of the game can come quicker than expected for some. For others it is not soon enough. Days drag slowly. They find themselves withering by the wayside with dreary repetitive routines. Sometimes the mind is willing, but the body isn't. The only challenges are the daily grind of dealing with an ever-growing list of ailments. You can only chuckle at the wisdom of the quote "Don't get old". You can hope that you may be one of the lucky ones that reach a ripe old age in good shape. Satisfying yourself with simple pleasures, right up to the end with a swift departure during a peaceful last night.

Living forever is more appealing if we remain in good health. Some believe they live forever in an afterlife of sorts. Some believe that they will create a legacy that lives on long after they are gone. The longer we are set to live the more cautious we may become. I suspect it would be unenviable being a beginner in a world of long living people. The incredibly rich and powerful won't get so handily unseated by their inherent perishability.

Plenty do their utmost to stay as healthy as possible hoping to maximise their longevity. Is a life a bit misdirected if it is consumed by self-preservation? Is the winner the one who lasts the longest? What is more important to you, quantity or quality, length of a life versus how good a life is? Where one is maintaining the best body, another is building the best house in the street. We have our own aims, so why mock those with different ones.

Some aspire to play their own game where possible rather than conform. That can be in the game of life as a whole or within the many sub-games. Courtship, politics, and work to name but a few. If you have ever sat with many others in a large auditorium listening to a great motivational speech, you are enthused to make changes. The speaker rouses the audience with what they are espousing. However, these thoughts pay no heed to the trade-offs. Seemingly positive changes bring downsides too. People are manipulative. Are they helping or are they getting you to do what they think is best? They may be proud of their 100-hour working week, but disregard how unsustainable that can be.

Most of us in the game of life will be spectators. It is numerically impossible to be any other way. A thousand in the stands for each one on the pitch. As a supporter we make an invaluable contribution by adding to the atmosphere in the football stadium or providing vital support to businesses and the community. All contributions count as every one of us has an impact even if just an ethereal interference. We don't have to do something outstanding to feel successful in life.

We may find success at something then be faced with a dilemma; do we rest on our laurels or quit and start some other game? Having mastered something, we might be inclined to find a new challenge. We have shown our mettle in one arena but may not make the same mark in another. How do we measure our success anyway? Is it measured in how famous we become? Or how wealthy? Or how happy or contented we feel. Do we have to achieve something exceptional? We might want to question our motives sometimes. Notoriety in particular is not a panacea. The job of running the highest office in the land may be enviable, but it is also restrictive. There is a trade-off between privileges and responsibility with freedom to do what you want anonymously at any time and on any date.

There will be many outside influences vying you to use the same scoring mechanism as them. Some measure progression by knowledge gained. Others value the creation of a family or position in a society. Many count the amount of material possessions amassed. If you walk around a graveyard, do you inspect the ornateness and size of the headstone or respect the age attained. Do you investigate the amount left in the will? Alternatively, do you sit and count the number of visitors to a plot and remark upon the freshness and quality of the flowers abandoned there.

Thankfully for those remaining, few people will rip up the pitch and knock down the goal posts when they retire from the sport. In fact, there seems to be a desire to ensure that the club is left in a better state than when they joined. Many bequeath a little for the enjoyment of future players and future spectators. They want their club to march forwards and hope that it will continue to succeed when they are no longer around. Such acts of generosity make them feel good about themselves and we can be grateful for it. A tree is planted for the next generation to awe.

Validity

It is not uncommon for people to feel worthless. That is because they feel they are worth less than others. We may not be as wealthy, as popular, or as well-known as others. We may not have such an apparently important job as others either, but we are all equally valid. We each have validity akin to a valid train ticket that gives us an entitlement to take a seat in one of the carriages. A person who is frail, disabled, or pregnant may appear to be more worthy of your seat than you. You might give it to them. You give it to them based on discretion and how generous you feel in that spot. We confuse the importance of a role with the importance of a person. I will never let someone in an important role jump the queue in front of me. My life is as important to me as their

life is to them. Only if there is some genuine emergency would I stand aside and let someone skip the wait.

There is a big difference between meritocracy and validity. In the game of football, we expect those with the most skill and athletic ability to be in the line-up. However, in too many areas we give way to people because of some artificial unwarranted respect. Are they richer or prettier. Were they chosen because there were favours or corruptive forces involved? Whatever the case may be, we are foolish to let go of the idea of equal validity. People may hold the 'leader of the nation' title. However, it is the job that is important rather than the person. It gives the holder of that job certain privileges for sure, but it is the position that is of the greatest importance. We install bodyguards to protect the person, but it is the post that is guarded the most.

Revanche

Some believe it is your fault no matter what. It is your fault because if you weren't there it wouldn't have happened. I recall a cyclist who encountered this reasoning when they hit an old lady who stepped out into the road without looking. She was the one stepping out without paying attention. The locals set upon him, dishing out punches - a little beating. The cyclist felt he was not to blame. He ended up being the biggest victim. A victim of circumstance. If it was your mother though, would you be impartial?

The game of life is riddled with players who cheat. Some do not realise they are at fault, but not all can hide behind that excuse. We will expose a cheat in a game of fun and shout more loudly if there is money and prestige involved. We want them excluded in future and penalised for their actions. Getting an unfair advantage at times can be a minor irritation compared to cases where somebody does something that is particularly malicious. Some have a total disregard of the damage they cause.

When you are subjected to an irreversible loss you have your rage, hurt and grief to contend with. Some can come to terms with it and move on after a while. They employ the counter play of living a forgiving life. However, this doesn't always provide the required catharsis. We can't get over it. We want to revenge. "If it means sacrificing myself in the process, then so be it." Say some, but most understand that realistically there is not much they can do. Many have a fear of further reprisals. If total innocents get hurt in the process when you are trying to get back at someone, the masses will be very upset. Absolute care is required to avoid getting the payback wrong.

Revenge may well be a dish best served cold - long after the event. You have the control now. You decide by what means and

when. When it is best for you and not for them. Most stick to non-violent actions, possibly a shout out at their wedding to let all their family know about their dastardly ways.

Some like to think of comeuppance and karma, but no amount of fiery hell can set straight the destruction some have instigated. Humankind rarely takes adequate early action to reign people in.

There are numerous fungi that appear to take over the body of ants. This makes the ant do most bizarre things, leading to their death. This behaviour manipulation is not reserved for ants alone, populations can have their behaviour manipulated too. It is usually a slow, step by step process. Whether it is a war or a fundamental change in ideology, small numbers press their system on to the masses little by little until a watershed moment and it is too late to do much about it. The masses may comprise of mainly decent people, but they are immaterial. They don't count as they largely go along with the master game players. You are viewed as an object, an asset, a thing to be used. There is very little respect for your game of life. Objecting gets you wiped off the game board. Control is obtained through fear. Fear of the consequences of fighting against the crusade. Fear of what they are making you fearful of. We have had fears of one sort or another since we stood up and began walking on two feet. The only change is the nature of that fear. Fear makes us selfish, and selfishness is a primary drive.

End of days

In our twilight years our priorities can change, and each hour of each day becomes more precious. Youth really is wasted on the young. So many things that we thought were significant are no longer so. Whatever situation we find ourselves in, we can fight on until the bitter end. Some put more focus on what we think really matters such as our friends and family. You never know for sure when your number is up and can rarely foresee a pending accident or upcoming illness. Even if things seem to be progressing fortuitously you will undoubtedly notice your teeth beginning to rot away, your hair greying and thinning out. Clear startling signs of your mortality. As we age our health deteriorates and all the worries and cares we once had dissipate.

The aging process causes our skin to lose its elasticity inside and out. A typical death through old age commences when the acidic contents of the stomach pierces the lining unabated and enters the bloodstream. Every last drop of heroin like reserves are released in the mind allowing us to depart on quite a high. Before this though, exhaustion can set in and we tend to reach a point where we fully appreciate that there is no limit to the number of people we would like to meet, or scientific studies that we may wish to embark upon, or places we may like to visit, or wealth we

want to collate or distribute, or politics that we feel inclined to amend, or how far and wide we would like to spread a message, or knowledge available to be sought, or do whatever thing that is of importance to us; acceptance of our limits is reached and the cares that we once had of the world and opportunities that it offered slide away. It is akin to returning to the time before we were born. Our unique set of preferences, affinities and abilities emerge, flourish, and then ebb away.

Mankind has collectively expanded its capability from one generation to the next. We feel sorry for individuals who have been integral in improving something, devoting a lifetime to it, but pass away well before they get to see the resultant applications of their work. Our lifespan is restricted, we can do nothing but accept the boundary and enjoy our turn.

Giving up

We can all feel like giving up sometimes. Sometimes when we are rather young. There can be good reason for giving up when we are old, for we feel we have seen it all and done all that we have wanted to do. Much of our curiosity is sated. We have got the answers we wanted. Only minor curiosity pathways have not been satisfied. We need these drives to be in full working operation. When your body begins to fail you might not be able to do all the things that you found rewarding in years prior. It depends on what gives you a thrill. The notion of old age being a golden age relies on luck.

We are biological machines and machines are renowned to go awry. If your curiosity disengages, so do you. There can be a pause in peoples' ability to feel reward too. They function very poorly as a result. Those that lose their selfishness become lost souls. When someone stops feeling pleased with themselves or stops getting any sense of gratification from daily activities, they lose all motivation to get out and do. We need that sense of moving forward and have direction in life. If any one of the drives disappears or wasn't formed properly in the first place, you are in effect much less human. Survival is wanted where the selfishness prospers. If you never feel good about helping, you are in danger of being helpless yourself.

To take one's own life because of an irreversible biological issue is one thing, but it is pathetic, to even consider it, just to avoid facing difficult circumstances. Debt, duty or trapped. Regardless of whether it is something you have had any control over or not, it doesn't have to be the end of the world for you. When you fall out or foul up there is always a way to figure out a solution. Apologise, make amends, reorganise, and restructure without wasting the chance to reroute.

Those reaching a nadir, the rock bottom, an extremely low point where life seems too much of a struggle to carry on can see it as an opportunity to pack their things and walk away. You can leave your troubles behind and start afresh somewhere else. If you are at a point where it can't get much worse, you really do have nothing to lose. Maybe you can return one day and explain yourself to those that worried about you. You can't explain yourself properly by leaving a note and jumping off a bridge.

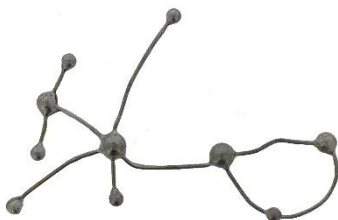
I said, 'just to avoid' facing difficult circumstances, at the time it feels more than 'just a difficult period'. We may feel totally heartbroken and fail to see a way forward. Those that do slog onwards have come out the other side relieved that they are still here. They will be bruised and battered for sure. They look back and see the turning point in their life. They become bigger characters afterwards. Shame and torment slowly fade, turning into a badge of honour, expanding your personality.

Whilst there will always be people that are at the ready to bully you and be very hurtful, escape is always possible. The game of life can be a monstrous challenge, bring it on rather than let it bring you down. Never concede - you can't regret dying. If ever in a spot of confusion you don't have to do it today. Leave it until next year and see how you feel then. You can be like those in war zones who considered themselves dead already. When they thought of themselves as dead already, they lost all fear of living. If you think of yourself as the walking dead, then you will have no difficulty unburdening your woes to people that will listen. You can take the fight to them with nothing to lose.

Think of the things you have not done yet. Think of all the people that you want to be with when they get together and have babies, pass exams, and get to where they want to go. There is no place for envy. Your time will come when you too will be the subject of interest to them also. Some have explored their co-considerational selfishness through charity work. They treasured the sense of being needed and feel much better about themselves. You do not have to do dull fundraising. Simple hands-on active involvement is as useful. You both gain, you more so. Plenty will appreciate your assistance but, in the process, you heal yourself. Helping others helps you in equal measure.

Choice

This chapter is dull as ditch water, dry as the desert, but those that bear with it might see something in it that is quite startling. We make choices all the time from what to eat, to who to vote for. Now you can choose whether to skip this very chapter or even bin the whole book. Does it matter how we go about choosing? Not really, but it gives a remarkable insight into how basic we humans are.



Babies don't do much more than 'eat, shit and sleep', but we as adults have moved far far away from that early stage. Or have we? It does appear that we turn into sophisticated animals. We can have multiple projects on the go. We deal with complex issues. We also have experience and knowledge to make rational choices. I am proposing that we create pathways in our mind, simple ones when you analyse them, that we follow over and over. In essence, I am saying that we are not terribly complicated at all. We start with a seed, an idea, a piece of information and then link more and more to it. These bunches of links, fretworks, dictate what we do and how we prioritise.

Free will is and always will be free, but any decision we make has its roots stemming from the days, weeks, and years before. We learn how to do something, we form habits, we do things instinctively and of course we can act 'out of character'. With so many modes of behaviour it is easy to see why free will is endlessly debated.

The starting point in this understanding of ourselves would be the seed. You are talking with someone, nothing unusual about that, and they mention skiing. Most of what we hear goes in one ear and out the other, but sometimes a word triggers us to investigate more. Curiosity once again, invoking the where, how much money would it cost, what is the likelihood of breaking several bones and is there snobbery involved. You have a desirable skiing trip at the centre and add information as you go along. You find the best ski resort within your budget. You work out when you can get time off work and look into what

equipment you would need to get. You also book some lessons prior. Now the fretwork is expanding in your mind. You might do all the preparation but not go in the end. The fretwork lingers, however. Any mention of skiing or snow and you ponder about the trip you planned. What I am saying is that your life is not much more than building and organising a bunch of links.

Prioritise

I have found some problems have taken less than five minutes to clarify. Others many days. How we prioritise was one that will sound rather corny, took a good while and is quite obvious. I considered a regular shopping trip and drew a map, putting all the items on one by one to create a visual representation of the simple links. Get bread, milk, tins etc, return a parcel and whilst there see if I can find a nice shirt. Having gleaned nothing from this exercise I tossed the paper on the floor. Then I saw it. The bigger the fretwork the more it is prioritised. No milk, no tea. The parcel has some importance. A full map is quite big when you include all the consequences. One thing may prevent you from doing another. The milk is not just milk, it is no drinks for our guests, no bowl of cereal for the kids.

It is hard to put into words how elementary our existence is. We dress things up and roam around aloof when simple biomechanical processes are at the heart of it.

Unlike your skiing trip, you do indeed head towards the door to go shopping. Then the phone rings. Someone is in hospital and needs a washbag and a change of clothes. Oh well, maybe I can have a look for a shirt another time. A quick dash to the local shop will dissolve the lack of milk situation, costs a bit more but never mind. I'll drop the parcel on the way. OK. Are you getting it? You broke the fretwork down, now the priorities change.

The process of deciding what to do works in the same way as priorities. We build fretworks, maybe pros and cons, should we should we not, what do we gain and what do we stand to lose. Time runs out or we are forced to come to a decision and then we approximate the relative size of the competing fretworks. The bigger one wins the day. The largest one always gets the go ahead and is often the largest because it hooks into prearranged bunches of links; what we describe as experience. A decision has nothing to do with the factors, but the number of factors and the space those factors each occupy. You think something is 'important' so have a big bunch of neurons set up in relation to it.

The clues are all in the language we use. We say, "on balance that was the best thing to do", "The advantages outweighed the disadvantages". We might take weeks deliberating what to do, gathering as much information as we can, then it all comes down

to a quick assertion of which group of neural links is the largest. It is worth noting that when we later get more information, namely the full story - more related links, we realise that we made an error of judgement. The size on one side would have been different if all the facts were present. More information can also detach sections and thereby discount them, again changing the size by reducing one side.



How do we win an argument? We counter reservations – reduce the scale of someone else's network of objections. And we add other items that increase the positivity of your point of view. We outline potential repercussions, the details of which need no explanation. When someone's life is under threat, vast banks of fretworks are called upon. All their hopes and dreams.

It doesn't matter who you are, a simpleton or a modern-day emperor, we have the same system in our heads. The problem you are presently dealing with may have huge significance to the world order or be rather silly. 'Silly', tiny, not of great merit in the grand scheme of things, however, the amount of neurons involved could be roughly the same as something 'big'. Hence why we place equal importance to it in our minds.

We spend a lot of time choosing and deciding, but not so much thought is put into the mechanics of how it is achieved. We might make a list of all the options then take a pick. We might decide upon something because it is a little different, fashionable or in keeping with our style. Each factor is another tail. The more positive tails the more chance there is that we choose it. You are controlled by how you build each fretwork. Good deeds, criminal acts and spontaneity all derive from the same mental process. The more links the more presence it has. As each fretwork expands it becomes more important to us. We have a job to get done. We need to do the job to get the money. We need to pay the bills. If the bills are not paid the electricity goes off. One thing leading to another.

Choosing what to do can be delayed when we have a circular path. With some links joining back up to where the thought process began, there is no clear boundary between the groups of links. We can't then measure the size of each group until we begin to separate out each aspect. We end up in a land of limbo, doing very little until this is sorted.

The essence of free will is about experiences and the knowledge you gain during your life. We find best practices (best for you), which are utilised over and over. The path of life is your way of doing things laid down by what you have done in the past. Your past doesn't dictate everything but will be the default route forward. We change by learning hard lessons and through discovering new joys. We have a store of negative and positive associations with certain actions. Parents may wonder why all efforts to advise their children is so often in vain. We are steered far more by first hand experiences. It is hard to convey the magnitude of an error by words alone. Personal experiences have large scale imprinting within the mind. Many more links created than any third-party knowledge transfer can provide. Along with words there will be sights, smells, and sounds to accompany the memory of an event. Plus, the chemical excitations that emotion brings. That can only be felt by the individual themselves. The rush, fright or exultation leave a mark.

Criminal acts

A parent with a criminal past lays down a story, one that other children would find alien. Some envisage that they will not be so stupid so won't get caught. Or it can spark a desire to live a more virtuous life. Few criminals begin at the 'top'; most will start with petty activities like stealing low value items from shops before progressing to more damaging activities. Rich people from well to do backgrounds have robbed a thing or two simply for the thrill of it. They have absolutely no need for the item they have stolen. The idea of having some excitement in their life along with the notion of being a little deviant is formed in their present fretwork.

At any time, we can choose to change but our predisposition counts significantly. Most folk walking down a street will be thinking, humming maybe, reflecting on the day ahead. Whereas a burglar will notice all the open windows, the opportunities to gain easy entry and flee afterwards, unchallenged. They will always be on the lookout for such chances as their fretwork contains so much knowledge relating to these acts. Gardeners clock the flowers. You and I might be identifying the breed of a dog or noticing the colour of the cats. Burglars will see animals giving off tell-tale signs of whether someone is at home or not. They are not predetermined to carry out the illegal action but care little about the victims, understand nothing of what it is like for those to suffer, and weigh the option of giving into temptation against the risk of getting caught. Any punishment and humiliation will alter the probability of committing further offences. More connections in the fretwork. The memory of being held down during arrest, hours in a prison cell and the loss of liberty and so on.

Some may propose that free will provides us with the means to act at random. In theory yes, but in practice we tend to start with the seed then build on it before proceeding. We can throw a dart upon a map and journey to where it lands. We can change our mind at any point but this itself is inspired by earlier dealings in life. For the most part we are moving about fairly autonomously with little real regard for ultimate reasons. The power and capacity of free will is not exercised as much as one might like to think.

Our will to be free is challenged by chemical imbalances, being intoxicated by too much alcohol or due to inhalation of industrial substances inadvertently. Provocation and poisons taken in unconsciously makes the ethics wrangle unanswerable. We can be equally stressed by disorders of the mind and damage inflicted in accidents. Being drunk may give rise to uncontrolled less coordinated behaviour but sober people can act very dangerously as well, wanting to show off without any need for dis-inhibitors like alcohol. People can defer responsibility to someone in charge. We are much more likely to hurt another when told to do so by someone in authority.

To find answers regarding someone's present behaviour we need only look at prior habits. Some see red and begin lashing out, acting wholeheartedly animalistic. Those accustomed to violence will use aggression with less forethought. It is an automatic response. That is what they have done on past occasions. They justified it in the past and will find it justifiable now too. The lack of control today stems from the development of someone's character over time. We can become more cautious if someone we take on turns out to be adept at fighting back. Once again, a link, this time to the pain we suffered before altering the balance.

We might appear to be roving complex animals with determination and individual freedom to do what we want. We like to think that we can easily change our mind and alter our plans, then alter again moments later for the sheer sake of it. The image of being nonconformist and contrary might seem endearing. Being inconsistent and seemingly random is a feature of the pattern of habits expressed before. We began doing so as a child. Doing things on the hop, if that is what we are familiar with, is what we continue to do. People do not change from a rigid way of life to become easy going free flowing wanderers overnight. It is a gradual shift. We do things that we are acquainted with and only embark on new ventures after learning about them in depth beforehand. You might have to 'cross each bridge as you come to it' but the crossing will be navigated by the knowledge you have.

We might want to break certain habits. We decide to quit drinking coffee. No particular reason, but that is what we want to do. We have one cup the minute we wake up and lots throughout the day. We associate doing something at a certain time of the day or with a particular place. The weaning off process entails gradual reduction. Rather than attempting to stop a habit altogether in one go, we can stop it bit by bit. Identify each time, place or trigger and choose one in turn to forgo. Tea instead of coffee at lunch time. Stick to it until it is embedded then move to the next. The fretwork then gets modified much more thoroughly.

That will do

At the buffet counter we pick a plate. Most take the top one, nearest to them. We select one that fits the bill from stacks of them. That will do. If we notice some dirt on it, we might swap it for another one. Subconsciously we say 'that will do' in countless scenarios. If something is sufficient and does the job we want, then we make the selection. We might make a more conscious choice about where to sit perhaps seeking the optimum spot where our back is to the wall and one seat in from the end. When this is not possible, and we don't want to make a big disturbance by rearranging all the furniture, we take the next best option. The process by which we decide things can be viewed as labyrinthine. We may mull over the finer points. Sometimes we hither and thither over the options available. However, if you draw a diagram of all the links that come to the fore, you can see why you chose what you did.

It would be nice to think that the time and diligence making decisions are correlated to the impact. Someone buying a house does not take 10000+ times longer selecting a property than what toppings to have on a pizza. More time and more research but less than the square root of the exertion in relation to the money at stake. Leaders will commit troops to battle are aware of the potential for huge losses on both sides. The consequences of a decisions in war are infinitely greater than those on a board game. However, the amount of time, effort and precaution is not infinitely greater in war compared to a board game. It is an aspect of being a human not a failure. If you think free will and determinism is a complex difficult subject, you may not realise or accept that choices are made by ludicrously simple processes.

Choices are made by the assessment of links in your mind. That assessment can lead to tragic consequences for any number of people involved. The mind can be rational but rash. The same assessment process is used for innocuous choices as implementing grand plans. The same mechanism for deciding what to do in a battle in a board game is used in a real war. Your mind gets easily carried away making one rash choice after

another. Your mind sees pieces as dispensable for the mind wants to resolve the mess - the mess in the mind. The pride for winning a war battle has a distinct equivalence to the pride in winning a game trophy.

More choice can mean more time spent worrying about which is the most suitable. If the bread on offer is just either white or brown, it is easier to make your mind up than if there are 44 types. We find ourselves weighing up the pros and cons of price, value, texture, taste, health factors, image, and a myriad of other innuendoes. Subtle differences, silly gimmicks work for they hook into our pre-existing fretworks – those on a budget, those looking to eat more healthily, those that crave frivolous toys.

Against our will

We can't be forced to do anything. Coerced blackmailed and cajoled maybe, but never really forced. Even with a gun to your head you can opt to die, call their bluff, or obfuscate the situation. Cooperation is promoted with narcotics but that merely reduces your ability to show your objection rather than get you onside. Soldiers will be given training to be non-complicit. If an interrogator asks them to hand them something, they will toss the item on the floor instead. Having the belief that we choose our own destiny is meaningful. What we can and cannot do depends strictly on what possibilities are available. First and foremost, you need to be aware of the options that exist. Hence why so much effort is made regarding the provision of education to expand people's outlook. Most objectives of any consequence require step by step assemblage of smaller components. Having the will to start and tackle each element is indispensable.

Doing the same as others

Why fight when you can trick someone instead. One dog wants the bone, but it is in the mouth of another dog. So, it plays with a ball, tricking the other dog to drop the bone and go for the ball. The conniver then takes the prey. An object of desire can play tricks on our inner certainty. We can be led to believe that we want something that we don't need and can be fooled into parting with an item that is better. It all comes down to confidence we have in our own selections. We doubt ourselves too often and act gullibly, surrendering to the whims of people who are simply perceived to be the ones to follow and emulate. Wanting what others have because they have it, rather than building a desire by ourselves is typical of this baboonian trait.

We learn how to do things by watching others at work. We learn a language by listening and repeating what others are saying. We copy so closely that we obtain the same local accent. The process of copying others is vital, and we couldn't progress quickly

without it, but there is a downside to it. It limits us. Sometimes it gets us into trouble. We have to be single minded enough at times to be our own master and attain the self-assurance to act differently to what the majority are doing. You won't always be right of course, there could be a good reason why so many are doing things in a particular way.

As soon as our taxi pulled up at the port, we were mobbed by people that were keen to help us with our luggage. They had money rolled up in one hand that signalled the amount they were expecting. It was an amount one might would work a good two hours to earn. It all seemed a frenzy, a rush. Unlike others, I elected to carry my own cases the short distance to drop it off. As it turned out we had the best part of two hours to do this. No rush as it first seemed.

How many friends have convinced you to do things that you would not have imagined doing without them egging you on? You probably had an impact on their behaviour too. It is only when you look back that you can see what a dreadful impediment these so called friends were. It can take several lifetimes for some to realise that sticking to your own guidance is possible. On the plus side, there is something very special about friendships that I am drawn towards. I can be very envious of those that maintain a long-standing alliance. We can see two people that are good friends and wish for a comparable friendship with someone ourselves. It is their strong connection they share rather than wanting to be friends with them in particular. Although changes in circumstances lead to many great friendships withering, our choices about what we put first says so much about what we place importance on in life.

I lost more at the poker table than I won, but I learnt a lot. I would often have an inkling of what I was up against, but it takes nerve to act upon your calculations. Once I had more faith, more self-assurance in what I had reasoned, I won a lot more hands and ultimately won a few tournaments. Once the cards were turned over, they often revealed what I had thought people were likely to have. We can have a good idea but nothing concrete. Obvious after, not quite so obvious before.

Many will not give credit to those that helped us fully understand something that appears quite obvious looking back. They helped us crystalise things. They put all the pieces we had in our head together. We may have a rough idea of what a word means, but its use makes much more sense when we consult the dictionary definition. We can spend a lot of our life doing things instinctively without any real understanding of why. Once things are explained to us better, we have clarity on certain issues. We move from doing things on auto pilot to an enlightened awakening.

Those fretworks in our mind will be torn and tugged by rational, logical arguments presented to us. They will also be skewed by sentiment and emotional arguments. Sentiment wins in the here and now, every time. Pretty much every time as only a dogmatic, stubborn sort will stick the course when all around there are people bleating sentimental sayings. Very few of us pair off in a rational way. We get attracted to and attached to things of sentimental value. We may choose beauty over conviviality. We opt for something because of the emotional attachment. When the reality of the situation becomes bleak, we then put more focus on pragmatism, logic, and rational objectives.

If you are trying to sell something to someone you may not choose to offer a lower price, guarantee longer durability, or impress the quality advantage. Instead, you tug at the heart strings. Something cute and cuddly may not do the job as well, but it has greater appeal to the mainstream. A politician could help half the population with an economic manoeuvre. They could make life much better for the majority by making a change to the law. They may win more plaudits though by enhancing something largely ornamental that people have a love and an affection for. We do crazy things for love. We act out of character and acquiesce due to sentimentality. We might spend a fortune trying to win a silly prize – because we want a sentimental souvenir. If we put any rational thought into it, we would not gamble money on that prize. We would get the same item, that prize, a fluffy toy in a shop nearby. That is logical. That is surety. It is not fun though. There is less of a story. The fluffy toy is cute, it is special, and we could gift it to someone we love.

The sentimental bones in our body are pre-linked to vast fretworks that have kept us in good stead and kept us happy. Logical rational decisions require painful analysis. Rational conclusions require work, looking at all the details and weighing up the trade-offs. Sentimental decisions are quick and easy. Sentimental ways, having your heart in the right place, meaning well, stops people accepting they were wrong. You can't turn the clock back. Nor can you complain to those that gave a mandate to those pushing for a sentimentally sound course of action. You can save one life, one life in the spotlight that is cute and lovely. Saving that one life becomes a sensational sentimental story. Rationally we could save hundreds of other lives with those same resources. Saving the most lives possible would be the most logical thing to do. However, we build an emotional attachment, an investment of fretworks in our head regarding the one life in peril. Sentimental losses are visceral. Large scale losses are dealt with in our head as one more statistic - to make a note of.

What is a clever person? Someone that uses what they have to get what they want maybe. Someone that invokes our sentimental sense of justice. Someone that praises often. Someone that charms. Someone that is not interested in giving someone a reality check. A manipulator. In the long run people that ride on the sentimental tracks can be defeated. A little pain and truth telling today pays off in the longer term. The cleverest of them all are those that can get someone to act in a rational way by using sentimental emotional persuasion.

Parallels

There was once a lady I knew who chided her child for showing off. "Calm down and stop showing off", said she. I noticed a parallel hypocrisy in how she behaved with that of her son. The son spoke loudly and boasted a little, for that he was admonished and criticized. The mother on the other hand had a habit of driving rather fancy cars. Not only that but went to great lengths to show off her fancy attire and fancy ways. She was regularly seen showing off, albeit in a rather different manner to her son.

The fear of god, the fear of heights, the fear of snakes and the fear that if we don't perform a ritual someone will die. Quite different fears but stemming from the same root anxiety. The same fear of coming to harm manifesting itself in untold number of ways. These fears each have a parallel with one another. Parallels are found in all walks of life. The issues men face, have a parallel with the issues unique to women. Same level of disconcertion, same amount of trouble and strife but in a different form.

Every psychological issue can be reduced to its simple form. It comes from the same trunk of the psychology tree but lies on a different branch. There are parallels between them all. We can be very reductionist. A therapist will work out what twig you are on, work down to the bottom and then tailor the same advice to your problem.

There is diversity within humans but each behaviour, each activity, each belief, each objective has a parallel to one another. Religions have parallels with social clubs. We believe what we are involved with is unique and different to that which others are involved with. In most cases they are far from different. They may seem different but are a carbon copy parallel.

Fixed

Human beings adapt and change. The mind can be quite flexible. However, some aspects of our mind and body are very much fixed. Our preferences are fixed. So too are our affinities. Affinities being what we gravitate towards. We also have a fixed limit to our abilities. Those that strive to be true to themselves recognise this. We may be frustrated by things we can't do, things which other people manage quite easily, but where they struggle, we might excel. We try things, experiment, working out what we are good at. We uncover what we enjoy the most.

As a child we ate lots of sweets and played trivial games. As a teenager we explored a range of activities. As an adult we matured a little and settled on the things we like the most perhaps. We go through life making lots of changes based on preferences. From what we eat, to what we do the most, to how we live as we get older. We say that we prefer this now to that. Saying that we prefer different things as time goes by makes it hard to argue that preferences are fixed. The idea of fixed preferences rankles with our perceptions of how we evolve. One must consider discovery. One must also consider what has changed if our preferences are indeed fixed. What we like the most must have changed instead.

Discovery

There are many things we try the once and avoid thereafter. Olives are one such thing. Many can find such strong tastes revolting - more of a shock and surprise though, as it can be a taste like no other, far different to what we have eaten before. Yet lots of people acquire a taste for them, overcoming any early resistance. The more you eat the less of a surprise it is. You begin to notice the subtle flavours. Not everyone will enjoy olives despite eating a full bucket load. Those that do, appreciate the qualities of such foodstuffs and get lifelong enjoyment from them. You discover what you like as you try things out, but you can only discover your preferences if you overcome any initial objection.

Ice skating may provide another example of this effect. You go ice skating. You fall over. You don't go again. Years down the line you meet an attractive partner who is hell bent on showing you how to skate. You hold hands because they are attractive, and it reduces your attraction to the floor. More practice leads to more competence and for some (not all) ice skating turns out to be something rather enjoyable. The preference was always there; it just laid there undiscovered. Our first impression of ice skating may not have been very positive. You can't decide whether you

enjoy something until you try it out properly and overcome the problems and difficulties you have with it.

A simple bare-bones song may chime with you instantly. Given that it is rather basic, one could get bored of it quite quickly though. Other songs have a lot more going on. More instruments creating a barrage of sound. One needs to listen to these fuller richer songs a good few times to appreciate the refinements of the arrangement. It is not until the track is played a fair few times that we discover the greatness. Discovery takes effort and time. Discovery is an essential part of understanding your preferences. You can't make any claims about your preferences until you have tried all there is to be tried and tried them all wholeheartedly.

Change

People can be mad keen about something then gradually the interest drops off. Sometimes we haven't had something for a while then we come back to it years later, only to be surprised that it wasn't how we remembered it to be. Maybe more pleasant maybe less so. Here lies the perfect reason to dismiss the case for having fixed preferences. Some people have followed a football team for decades. Then the appeal diminishes. How can someone like something so much, for so long, then go off it? If you showed such a preference for football over tennis before, why are you watching tennis now and paying little attention to the eleven aside game? Games change, games evolve, bringing new followers with it. Players become professional, more commercial minded and sometimes it can be argued the spirit gets lost along the way. A team with faster more athletic players earning more money perhaps can be less pleasing to long-time observers. People preferred the way it was, not the way it is now. Your preference has not changed, the thing that you enjoyed has.

When we think of preferences, we often think about what we eat. Olives tend to be fairly consistent over time, unless some mad botanist meddles with their makeup to alter yield and shelf-life etc. Some products do have their ingredients interfered with, changing their taste and mouth feel. More sugar, less salt, and more whey to replace pricey constituent elements. When manufacturers alter their creations, they do it gradually, bit by bit, praying that consumers don't notice. Some chocolate makers have reduced the cocoa content significantly. Down from a third of the bar to a fifth. Hence why your perceived preference for chocolate may dissipate. You preferred products of the past rather than the concoctions of the present. Endless other examples could be cited in support of this.

A large drinks manufacturer dropped the formula that had been used for decades in favour of a new improved variety. This new stuff came out ahead in every focus group. People said it tasted

better. However, all the people that liked the old variety went from town to town buying every last can, stockpiling what they could. Let's just say the new drink was quietly dropped and the old mixture returned to the shelves after the company lost a small fortune. Preferences control the purse strings.

Associations

Being ill can make you appreciate the good times. To be ill enough to take the day off work but not so bad that you wish you were dead can give you time to reflect. It is quite sanctifying.

Those that think drinking fresh fruit juice will ward off a cold gleefully consume lots when the rest of the family are throwing up in the toilet with groaning exaggerated expressions. Sometime later you follow suit, re-tasting the orange juice drank shortly beforehand. From then on, the sight of orange juice brings back memories of that emetic time. You drank it happily, readily before but now you declare that you would prefer something else to drink instead. These associations are powerful. They can linger for a long time. In some cases, you might avoid oranges and orange juice for years. However, after several hundred revolutions of the earth you try it again, albeit with a little trepidation. You announce to the world that you like orange juice again via attention seeking displays and fanfares. You have returned to the former state with the original list of drinks that you like, ranked in the same original preference order.

The intensity of associations we have with things can become so great that we become phobic. A total rejection of something that you inherently like but avoid because of bad experiences associated with it. In such instances, significant effort is required to dismantle the connections in your mind derailing your preferences. Associations help us stay safe sometimes. They keep us clear of the ugly whilst also drawing us towards the super and sublime. Bad associations put a blanket over our preferences.

The art of seduction is to enchant and make something feel vastly desirable through make believe. Our senses are swindled. Seduction is pretence over honesty. We can be seduced by advertisements and seduction lies at the heart of peer influence. Our friends seduce us into saying that we like the same things as them. We attempt to shift other people's preferences by promoting all the positives. Those with the greatest notoriety and respect gleaned from others go to war with our inbuilt preferences. To be at one with yourself you need to be at one with your own preferences. You need to understand that your preferences can't be moulded and shaped at will to suit others. When a friend says something positive about something we may agree but agree with dishonesty. The wise may agree however, knowing that it is good to be polite and diplomatic.

We can't change the core of what we are. We can't change what we are given at birth by design. Nurture plays a huge role in how we turn out but some aspects of us are fixed. It is a cornerstone of who we are as individuals. The things that we have a strong preference for, things that we go to great lengths to seek out are what I call affinities. A powerful force are they.

Limits to your abilities

"If you try hard enough you can achieve anything." If you are a midget, two-foot-tall, you are extremely unlikely to beat the world high jump record. Not just unlikely, totally improbable. Someone could try for years on end with the best training, the best running shoes and with the finest diet coupled with the most perseverance imaginable. Yet no matter how hard they try they will never beat the fastest runners and highest jumpers on earth. Most will not even come close. You have in other words, defined limitations.

There are maximums to your abilities physical and mental. These limits are set out in your design. To reach the greatest potential you will need to be made right, right from conception. Those that reached their greatest potential came from mothers than ate well and didn't get hampered by a polluted environment. The mental side of things counts as much as the physical. It takes a massive amount of practice, refinement, and doggedness to exploit your potential fully. The effort is the nurture, the design is the nature. It is all very well saying that someone could have got there if they tried harder, but they may have put everything they had into something and still fall short of expectations.

Your mind will be configured in a way that gives you excellence in certain thinking-based activities. It might appear to be more malleable than other physical constraints. However, your mental makeup has constraints regardless of its adaptability in the same way as you have a maximum stride length and limited running endurance. Certain drugs will of course enhance performance and increase the rate of improvement a bit. The boundaries of your design envelope can be pushed and stretched by artificial means. Some will go down this avenue despite the risk of a premature death. Realigning your potential in such a way doesn't imbue upon your natural limits laid down in your personal design.

When we take something up like learning an instrument or engage in a sport, we make good progress at first. We work and work at it trying to get good at it. However, as time goes by, we find the increments of improvement becoming smaller and smaller. We find our limit. To get a tiny bit better we have to put ever increasing amounts of practice in for less and less reward. We reach our maximum potential in that field.

Finding yourself via trial and error is a long journey that begins with the understanding that your preferences can't be changed, nor your affinities and there are limits to what you can achieve. It also means that you must get over any bad experiences that you may have along the way. The world changes but what we like does not. There may be people that you look up to and wish to beat or share the stage with, but sometimes, no amount of trying will see you get a chance of doing as well as them. Your affinities in the sexual sense are unchangeable. What you like is what you like.

"I still believe my preferences have changed over time."

A hammer will do it. Smash yourself up, even inadvertently and then yes, a preference can be damaged. What about If you lost your sense of smell, what happens then? Some unfortunate souls have indeed lost this fabulous sense when they caught the flu and it never returned. Smell links with taste. Food no longer tastes of much and you are left with only texture to go by. How then can we still prefer strawberries over gooseberries?

A guillotine came down quickly, too quick for your reactions and you are without a hand. Prosthetics help. They are improving all the time, but it can alter what you want to do now, maybe spurring you on in a different direction with multiple upsides. The time wasted throwing javelins can now be spent on one handed golf. Actually, both are possible one handed. Consider the preferences you have been infused with as the central core. To access them you need your sensory inputs and the physicality of your body to garner its movement and hits it is subjected to. You are degrading daily. The more you degrade, the more confused you become in terms of your preferences. If you look at preferences deeply you see that they don't change. A current preference is not the same as a core preference. You will be doing something because of convenience, fashion or to satisfy another objective. You will be doing it because it is nearer, cheaper or because certain people make it fun. Ideally you would prefer it if great people were doing the type of thing you like the best in a location not too far away.

When you emerged from the birth canal or were whipped out narrowly missed by the sharpest scalpel, you begun the process of discovery. The milk, warmth and being held tightly to the bosom of those cultivating you weighed far more than sexual activity you may have twenty years down the line. At that age you can hear a pin drop. Each year your hearing gets a little worse. You become deaf to high pitched sounds in your twenties. Your dexterity declines. There will be a time where you are at peak performance then every body function deteriorates. This impacts how you facilitate your preferences.

Preferences and physical ability may not align. You may be born with the capability to handle a flute with aplomb but detest every aspect of it. You may discover that you are quite good at something but still prefer doing something else. Preferences are both complex and quite straightforward. Sounds chime or grate with your molecules. Things resonate or jar. Some things evoke passion and joy as they chime, slot in, register with those inbuilt preferences allotted to you at conception. The keys that coincide with your lock. From that simple core it becomes a mush. Memories, experiences, exceptions, the weather, and who you are with, coming into play. If you are with your girlfriend, you prefer to do x. If you are alone, you prefer to do y. So many factors that interact with your desire to do things. It gets complicated quite quickly. Preferences are at the bottom. So much is stacked above that it makes them seem unclear. What you prefer to do on a rainy day will be different to when the sun is shining. That doesn't change what you would prefer to do in an ideal world.

Happiness

Protection is the number one priority in the survival game, followed by shelter, water, and food. There is no point snuggling up in a camp with food and drink galore if you are going to be eaten by an army of ants or mauled by a bear. Having somewhere safe to spend the night is high up on our list of important things to sort out. This applies to the mega rich moguls who are fearful of being kidnapped to the homeless people. Nothing is worse than trying to go to sleep with the fear of someone setting fire to your alcoholic breath or beating you up for some perverse few minutes of entertainment. The second consideration for your hideout is whether it provides shelter from the wind and rain. Once that is resolved you can think about something to stop your tummy rumbling. What prey has this got to do with happiness one may wonder? Well, happiness is rooted in having the basics in life in place followed by a range of things that we as individuals want.

A flower embodies happiness. The need to be rooted. The potential to bloom. It is made of many parts. It can be incomplete - missing a petal or two. It gives, nectar. It radiates making itself seen. Beauty and fragility.

Hours and hours can be whiled away discussing the complex subject of happiness, presumptions are made, myths are banded about. Some have a perception that those that live in the corners of the globe that 'suffer' long cold winters are prone to a greater degree of depression and suicides. That is not the case. The weather is a petal but not the whole flower.

Lots of little things will lift our mood. Bugbears can lower it. Our present mood may not always affect how we feel in general, but I defy anyone who can wait around in the freezing cold for a non-existent bus and not feel miserable. There is a gulf of difference between going home to sit in a comfy chair next to a log fire rather than returning to a cold damp swine box of a room. Noises outside that make you glad of being tucked up instead of noises outside that are aggravating and induce fear and worry. Not too hot, not too cold, and away from threats can make us happy in the moment.

Roses have thorns, happiness has exceptions. No matter what line of thought you try there is always at least one person that throws up something that puts a spanner in the works. Not everyone needs vast wealth, not everyone needs a partner to stave off loneliness, not everyone cares about how they look or how large or skinny they are. Not everyone needs to be successful, not everyone needs a permanent home. Plus, what makes one person

happy is another's worst nightmare. You can be happy making do or happy overcoming challenges.

I say we need to be rooted but what about a travelling community. Ok they have roots to their kin and usually travel in groups. Rooted to one another. But a true drifter can wander from one place to the next, never dwelling long enough to bind to the soil. Thus, we may contend that it all depends on what type of plant we are. Some need to settle, others can harvest what they need floating along like algae. In every aspect of happiness, you are likely to encounter those that smash your beliefs, challenging what you hold to be true. Those facing eviction feel that the loss of their home is going to be their worst nightmare, but others shrug it off as a minor inconvenience and an opportunity to explore elsewhere. Some, not many, select homelessness for its freedom.



The stalk of the happiness flower represents the thing that supports you, usually your partner-relationship. The head represents the most important thing to us, namely our health. We try and assemble as many petals as we can, children, a good job, fun hobbies, enthralling activities, friends and so on. Once content with our petals, we may start looking for more advanced forms of joy. We may seek enlightenment. Some have nectar to spare so they give to others, philanthropise, enjoying the internal reward obtained from kindness.

Our levels of happiness are relative. Some are content with a film to watch, a pie in the oven and a pack of beers in the fridge. Others want to experience fine dining and 'glamorous' events. What is more common to all is summed up in the most apt saying of all; "variety is the spice of life". We find change when we go on holiday for a break. It is nice to go away and nice to return home too. To get out of a stuffy room and get some fresh air. To go from hungry to full. When tired, get some good sleep and wake refreshed. To read for a bit, then go for a walk and explore. Meeting up with decent folk and chatting animatedly followed by a musical rave. Try idling away an hour or so, just sitting, watching the landscape allowing yourself to think and ratify your thoughts free from anything distracting. However, sitting at home day after day bludgeons the soul and scrapes away at our morale. It comes down to the ratio of time alone and time with others. Change can be had from going out somewhere just for the sake of it. Getting out for a while at the very least gives us something to talk about.

Variety can be found in many areas of our life. We can change what we wear or decide upon a new pastime, something fresh something new. Even a new sauce on our chips adds to the joy. It is rare to find happiness in doing the exact same thing over and over for extended periods. Having said that we might find some

things that we do frequently that we do not get bored by. You may have an exercise regime where you can see some progress. It can be the same activity but aspects of it differ. Maybe the scenery changes, or the people, or we challenge ourselves more. People criticise those that do the same thing over and over, yet live a life full of repetition themselves. If something is good, why on earth would you not want to go again and again.

There can be a never-ending search for more and that is usually good. Contentment comes from the search and seeking and the plotting and planning. Static stasis is not conducive with happiness. Hoping for more is.

We can be busy, busy, busy, or just sufficiently occupied with time spare to deviate at will. A schedule that marks out days rather than blots the landscape. Lots also find themselves with too much to read, examine and digest, maybe feeling obliged to respond to heaps of it as well. Information overload can be a burden with pressure to keep up with what is supposed to be a fun and pleasurable interaction. We are sold an illusion. How much do we really need to keep abreast of? Does your cat care? Does your dog or the woodpecker give a damn? You may feel that keeping abreast with everything is essential. Once you realise that vital it isn't, you see that you were not missing out on much at all and only wish you came to that conclusion earlier.

I and many others find it hard to get to sleep when we know we have to get up early. I engineer my day ahead to avoid early departures. I gained the freedom to get up when I want. Freedom and happiness can be intertwined.

We can be instructed by the wise to be grateful for what we have. That word, grateful, is paraded abundantly in therapy. We can indeed find many a thing to be grateful for. We can still yearn for something though. For that, another word is relevant. Persistence. To get what we yearn for, one must keep trying.

Can we make changes in our lives to bring about as much happiness as possible? I presume it is possible. You may hunt down a soulmate, someone who you are predominantly at ease with. Someone with warts in their character that are excusable. That soulmate, the stalk of the flower that raises your life off the floor into the fray. It makes an incredible difference. Sometimes a difference that takes too many words to describe. Blooming marvellous bliss.

Some people take great pleasure in telling us how content they are with their small weekly wage. Many have given up well paid jobs to create more freedom in their lives and never looked back. Good for them. Our situations vary so much though. There is no simple formula for inciting happiness in everyone's current

position. Some of us have responsibilities placed on them. Not all by choice. Some have children to look after plus older parents that want daily assistance too. Stuck in the middle, longing for a permanent respite from all the obligations. Then many discover that when their children do finally leave home, a void appears. A feeling of purpose, a reason for being, is linked to happiness.

You can be a solitary happy flower in a sea scape of dry sandy desert, but celibacy is not hereditary. Any discourse, discussion, debate, and general interaction with others tends to be very uplifting. Some say that we ought to identify all those little joys and make sure they are inserted into our days. The accumulative effect of all these small pleasures can be good.

We can feel good about ourselves when we do something to a high standard rather than leaving after bodging a job. If you're happy I'm happy. No nagging spouse, no griping child, no disaffected complaining customers.

A quick glance in the mirror can let us reflect on the yearning for the looks of youth. Do we feel that the increase in our stature is a fine compensation for all those wrinkles? It all seems so different when in constant debilitating pain, debt, or grief. Many people will have little to complain about, they have the basics in place; a nice home, a reasonable income, and a family all in good health. Then they may start seeking something more - higher forms of fulfilment. They may wish to bolster their self-esteem, toy with charity work, or seek what they regard as some form of spiritual enlightenment.

The mature ones have in their own way and to their own extent, explored their world and found what fits their preferred lifestyle. Change can be subtle. Rather than grand adventures, a new flavour tea or a new handcraft to while away the time. Less impulsive randomness, but nevertheless plenty of variation. Some can become reticent to any changes in their locality. They become accustomed to the way things are and prefer it to remain so. Younger people can find a passion to see things advance. They latch on to a cause with great enthusiasm and aren't sobered by the realisation that it takes time to change peoples' mindset. Change happens at a glacial pace. The eagerness can be a help, but few stop to think about whether they are going about it in the right way.

Problems with people can fester. We shy away from arguments believing that they are best avoided but arguments usually lead to something better. If there is bad air in your home, do you locate the source of the offending odorous gunk or leave the house and hope it will simply vanish? Running away doesn't fix things. So long as the arguments are not all day every day, we need not fear causing some occasional upset. You will get along better with people when you are prepared to debate, discuss, and argue with them.

Happiness may need an occasional jolt. A reminder of what is most important. Perhaps a visit to someone with a large house all nicely furnished. Plenty of trimmings inside and out. Then the bitter pill to swallow; they lost an only child in a road accident. The things around them are just material. The life the child did have was superb. However, no distraction stops them thinking about what could have been avoided. If only. These thoughts linger. Do they need help to move on? They have nothing much to move on to.

Having a problem free life may sound appealing but being problem free can be a problem in itself. Having something to address, something to fix can be a part of the reason we want to live. People get a lot from finding a way through all sorts of problems. Find a solution for someone. Make their life easier. Enable them to do things they enjoy. Whilst it makes them happy, it can bring you a tear of joy, or two, too.

Our mind can seem awry. We jump at the chance to take some pills or gabber with a therapist every Tuesday afternoon for weeks on end. A minority can be afflicted with a tiredness that clouds the whole of the waking day. No matter what change in diet or change in behaviour, the debilitating effect is not alleviated. Changing a few thoughts can be miraculous for some, but not in this case. You may just have to get used to your wild mood swings and come to a realisation that we are all different. We were never meant to be like what everyone else appears to be. Note. *Appears to be*.

Are you trying to prove your worth? Are you trying to justify your existence? Do you need to demonstrate that the world needs you? The world needs nobody, nobody in particular, just enough fine people to keep things in order.

There is one common trigger for causing a spell of feeling down. It is when people ignore you or fail to grasp your point of view. You try and present logical sensible reasoning, but despite that, certain people refuse to listen. They seem to know best. They jump to the wrong conclusions about what you are saying. They

are dismissive. Is there a solution to that wave of fed-up-ness that comes over you when this happens? You may need to ask if that is the sole person that needs to be convinced. It might be worth rechecking what you have to say anyway. Sometimes we present our case and leave it be or wait a while and try another tack. You will encounter the utter arrogant that will never be swayed. Is progress being made elsewhere? It is grim waiting to get your voice heard, if not by a jury but by someone that is willing to listen and take notice. Is there something else you can do in the meantime?

Are you drawn to miserable or someone with a smile on their face? Smiling is contagious. Smile and people will smile back at you. If they don't then you can at least gauge something. Few of us can say hello in 200 languages but smiling crosses all boundaries. It is nice to avoid telling people what they should do but I like reminding people of how great smiling is. I found that it pays to try and try again with people that are down. Unfortunately, there are times where ultimately the only way forward is to provide some space. Hopefully, they will change when they realise that their negative and pessimistic views on life are driving others away. It is difficult, as we end up in a vicious circle. We come across as miserable and people avoid us which adds to our misery. We have to put on a show and fake it until we make it through.

Blame

Blame it on our parents, blame on it all the torture meted out in school, blame it on an illness or some disability, but never blame anything on our own stance. Our parents may have been misguided, cruel or inept. Some of us grew up in abject poverty, so poor that we had little food and no running water. Whilst you are happy that you are not living in abject poverty, you feel the psychological effects of relative poverty – you have less than most of your friends. Some of us had it all.

Many rich people become rich due to the unbending desire to go much further than their parents. Many that were given the most privileges and easiest of times can be the ones that find themselves becoming wayward, confused, and disappointed. Namely, those who felt like princes/princesses, praised endlessly for insignificant achievements that took no effort or resolve. Much more so than those who went through a huge struggle. Our formative years makes us who we are. Misfortune need not limit us. Misfortune can be transformed into fortune or fortitude.

Our adult life can be full of sorrow, viewed as a plant grown in bad soil. Or we can look for advantages that we have. Self-pity gets us nowhere. The roots of the happiness flower may have struggled in ropery ground but that makes the root tentacles potent. Those

who were abused have gone on to do their utmost to prevent others from suffering the same torment. Can you turn the issue on its head and view it as an opportunity? From the ashes of a past life of hell we can alter what happens next. The pain can give us the resolve to do an awful lot of positive. Sufferance can benefit our identity.

Some problems have no solution particularly the taste of caviar problem which entails getting a taste of something most good, most suited to you, most enjoyable, most rewarding, most wanted. Now it is gone. Now you must resign yourself to things that are barely second best. Happiness is convoluted and involves some luck. Luck that you discovered great things, yet you might have been happier not knowing, not experiencing, not immersing yourself in places that you can't remain.

There will be one or two other things that you are not rubbish at. It is not compensation, but the awful reality.

There will be one person out there that will marry you.

Some are unhappy because they feel that they are a nuisance. We are all a nuisance to some degree. You have been a nuisance, a bit of a pain since you were born. We all are. And that is usually why you are loved.

Distraction

Distraction is great for repressing boredom. It also wonderful for pain relief. We can keep ourselves busy, fully occupied, so much so that we are able to avoid facing our difficulties. Distraction techniques have their place, but never-ending distractions can shield us from an entire life of living. Is this distraction a helpful way of easing the suffering until thy body heals itself? Or am I deferring facing what needs to be done to cure the source of the anguish. A visit by a friend who makes you laugh will enable an hour to whiz by. You temporarily forget that you are unwell and in pain. This can be great. Some though are distracted for their entire time on earth. Where were you taught to be forever distracted, and by whom? How did they benefit? People profit from getting people's attention and holding it for as long as possible using novelty, curiosity, and micro rewards.

Time flies by when we are focused on something we are reading, watching, or dealing with. Superb when we are waiting to board a ferry or for the breakdown truck to come and fix our car. Life though can fall into a state of never-ending waiting for things to happen, with distraction oiling life's engine.

Our spare time is ours to fill. How you consume that spare time is up to you. You need not apologise, nor make any excuses, nor provide rationale, nor justification for your choices in regard to your free time. People have a belief that whilst we are distracted, we don't get to experience other things. Other things that they deem more constructive, creative, purposeful, meaningful, advantageous. However, it is measured by their rating system, not yours. What is meaningful to them may not be meaningful to you. What people say you are missing out on may not be particularly significant to you. However, being absorbed in the moment does affect our awareness. Whether that is seen as a positive or not depends on what we want to achieve. Distraction is an aid in procrastination. Distractions hinders our thought processes. It delays reckonings.

Distraction has a place in our lives, but it also stops us from appreciating the richness and subtleties of what is in front of us. Atmosphere is not created in an instant; it builds slowly, and distraction removes our attention from the moment jarring the joy. Eat something whilst in the middle of a discussion. Eat the same thing in silence, alone. The curiosity will be directed differently. The rewards will differ. Distraction makes a difference. Not necessarily better nor necessarily worse, different.

Fair

The frog lies in wait for any fair game. Whilst on the lookout for insects she is also aware of the nasty birds that are after some lunch too. They can end the frog's time on earth. It is jolly unfair that the bird is bigger, faster, and most cheekily - equipped with special vision that highlights the whereabouts of this lowly amphibian. The frog is hoping most of all to enter the human arena by virtue of being kissed by a prince. For this new form of existence is based on higher intelligence and has systems in place to make it fair for all.

The frog not only turns into a charming princess but has a say so in regards the finer details. Does it want to be really pretty, pretty smart, pretty tall or a pretty good singer. This is a form of fairness that the standard humans do not get to make. We the people that are born from other people may have many desires. We would love to sing to large crowds but the sound we make is too close to that of a strangled cat. It is unfair that some can sing well and make a jolly good income from it, plus get heaps of adoration. Likewise, there are those that can run very fast. They are coveted for competitions with huge prizes. There are always the few that have the edge, the crucial, sometimes small mark of distinction that benefits their life. The rest, the majority are just too middling.

My friend is doing better than me at school. Why? Not because they have rich parents, oh no, just because their parents spent a bit more time with them, reading, writing, and talking with them.

Today was another unfair day. I was rather thirsty and had to queue to use the vending machine. It is deemed fair to wait our turn. However, my drink got stuck and failed to come out. I had paid the same as everyone else yet was left without. I feel cheated, why did that only happen to me? The day went from bad to worse. I discovered by pure chance that I have been paying close to double what "locals" are paying for their food at the restaurant. Then I went to the wholesaler and found out that my competitors are better at haggling than me. They are being charged much less for their supplies. It is not the cost savings, it is the principle that annoys me the most. Maybe life as a frog is not so complicated. I know that I and three siblings were the only ones to reach adulthood. The fish ate all the other spawn that came from my mother's rear, hundreds of them. Count myself lucky is what you might be thinking.

My transformation from frog to person has gone rather swimmingly. Disappointingly that is not the case for all. Some have found that their skin is forever falling off and they need to

be carefully rebandaged every day, painfully so. As for me, I do hope that my hair doesn't start falling out as I get older, that will not look nice. I am sure those that have found that to be the case find it unfair, but so be it. Maybe there will be a future where such issues like this can be remedied. Fixed without side effects nor compromise. One way or another there seems to be those with an advantage relating to the mind or body. How can we level the playing field? Would a homogenised society be better – all talented, all equally handsome, all as clever, thus none remarkable?

As a frog, I found a pond where I could exterminate, for the benefit of my stomach, enough fodder for the day within a few hours. That left the rest of the day to do as I please. Other frogs like to do the job in a more plodding manner. Now that I am in the human work environment, I face the same issue. Some of my colleagues are, believe it or not, even faster than me. They get three times as much done in a day and are paid three times more. We tried a system where we got paid according to the amount of time on duty. The productivity dropped too much, and it had to be abandoned. Where the system was tried in other work places it went more smoothly. I think it would be fairer if I simply got a promotion and became a manager. That way I need not worry about how fast I work. I will get paid regardless and more than those on the shop floor. Some very pleasant souls have found themselves to be at the forefront of the fairest way to deal with the very slow paced, every employer says, "no thanks (go away)".

Maybe all this whinging about the difference in earnings could be sorted by us all having an earnings rate card. The more we earn the more we pay for all goods and services. Some already pay more into the community depending on how grand their house is. This could be extended to all their purchases.

As a frog, going anywhere near a road was a very hazardous affair indeed. Some drivers took pleasure in squashing us. They got their comeuppance, long after they thought they got away with it. As a much taller animal we sometimes step into the road at a dedicated crossing point where the drivers are obliged to stop. But stop they do not always do. We have a choice, be dead right or step back and bury our pride. It can be fun to joke around and mess about with people. Sometimes people abuse their physical superiority and react by grabbing someone by the throat or putting them in a headlock. The victim feels more than just aggrieved, they feel powerless and humiliated. What makes these situations worse is that other people just stand by and don't intervene. Life in this instance is again unfair. We can look out for the warning signs and back off before they jump on us. It can take a lot of traumata before one begins to accept that certain people

are dangerous. They are like tigers and lions that won't hesitate to maul you given the opportunity.

Being at the mercy of someone else is the most hated aspect of the offence. They dictate your future in that moment. In some cases, any sexual aspect of the horror can be secondary to the inability to escape their grip.

The law is there to protect us, but in that moment it is useless. So many people are damaged by violence meted out by those that can't control themselves. If we poke the bear, it will lash out. We tend to learn the hard way, after the event. Some have narrow escapes and learn the dangers. Someone that is bigger than you is right no matter what. They are right and you are wrong and that is it. Dolphins eat fish, fish eat other fish. Animals gorge on one another. The world is both a beautiful and a sick place. Frogs are weak, as are you. Frogs that survive choose their ponds wisely.

A dainty princess with more beauty than brute strength learns to get out of the way when trouble is brewing. Some butch types are more inclined to stand firm. With many successes under their belt, they have a belief that they can withstand any aggressive situation. That is until they are cut down by one nefarious use of a small sharp object. In the long run, there is no point in trying to fight everyone. Even the strongest will be defeated eventually, either by someone nimbler or plain luckier. Loss of dignity in the moment and not having to worry about saving face is humbling but safer. Is it worth putting your survival at jeopardy when the issue is just derisive words or slander? Is the will to act better kept for when you or somebody else's physical wellbeing is imperilled.

Governments aim to protect the citizens from dangers at home and abroad. They can try and reduce what it sees as unfairness and discriminatory behaviour even though the world is and never will be ordered and truly fair. Unfairness is a part of the rough and tumble of life. Unfairness is the consequence of the random chaotic nature of the world that brings life in the first place. We like fairness particularly when it suits us. Few shy away from being a member of the privileged set if the opportunity arises. To be thought of as a very-important-person even for just one night is attractive. We want to feel worthy and as good as the rest, not marked out nor victimised. We dislike discrimination. Many won't accept it and will do something to try and address it. A café owner can charge what they like to whoever they like as it is their café, but some do not see it that way. Favouritism is not viewed as endearing.

It is usually those with the most privileges that are keenest to espouse the notion of fairness. For them it is different for they have worked harder, have more certificates, or have parents that belong to a higher class. Some propose special car lanes to avoid

the traffic jams and the first choice in all offerings. Fairness is always about how it affects us personally. Take from the rich and give to the poor so long as the rich are defined as only those with more than me.

Excuses aplenty

Some people have read and studied the book entitled “1001 reasons and excuses for not doing something”, others unwittingly seem to know it inside out. It provides plenty of ammunition to formulate a valid explanation for why things are delayed or not done. If they had used that time making a start instead of coming up with excuses, they would be halfway towards finishing.

“It is alright for you.” Is one of my favourite lines. It is great for winding people up. It also expresses how other people have unfair advantages. Alternatively, it says that I don’t want to make the effort that you have.

You can be positive with some pessimism; Disappointment is expected. Each failure is another avenue checked out. The proactive trier. Another way is to be negative and optimistic. Everything is done half-heartedly. One day someone will detect how valuable you are. They will raise your profile giving you the chance that you think you deserve. The fantasist.

Social capital

The initial sum of social capital you have is set by your parents. There is good reason why we select the most attractive partner available by any means. Physically strong attractive males and beautiful females have untold advantages granted to them that no money can buy. The social capital that your children start life with depends on their genetics. It can be boosted by a parent’s ability to nurture too. Choosing a healthy, attractive partner, increases your children’s potential of having a bountiful satisfying life, incredibly so.

One can increase their social capital through deft plying the political landscape. Making good connections and conniving. The usual trick of charm, fake or otherwise in pursuit of maximum popularity works wonders. It can take a long time to build social capital and all that hard work can be destroyed remarkably quickly by defamation or ill-judged malevolent actions. Impropropriety, sexual assault, or criminal actions cost us enormously in the social capital stakes. Damaging someone else’s social capital rids us of competition.

One measure of our social capital can be seen in our ability to bully, to organise events or to coordinate social gatherings. Social capital can often trump financial capital. Buying friends is a folly. Those with plenty of financial wealth can be lonely. What is the point in having the means to travel if you have no one to share

the joys with. No one to recount the tales to, no one that cares about your travails. A party held in less salubrious venues can bring more gladness than a party with mere pomp and ceremony. If life is a pursuit of gratification and happiness, then social capital enables these feelings to flourish.

We are jinxed from the outset or bequeathed a huge head start. It is nothing but unfair. That unfair disparity galls those that see others take what they have for granted. Many of us, far too many of us do not realise what they have been given.

Lots of energy is used educating ourselves, enhancing ourselves, and collecting material wealth. In retrospect we wonder if it was worth the toll it took on us. A lot of stress and heartache for what? We spent our days pursuing dreams that turn out to be chasing rainbows. Making sure your appearance is as fine as it can be is not daft though. Makeup, delightfully impressive clothing, and all that attention to detail has a valid purpose. It helps people make positive judgements about us. We judge continuously. All of us judge one another. We listen far more to those with lots of social capital. The respect we have for someone is based on it. We treat people accordingly to our evaluation of their social capital.

Whilst mankind had pushed and prodded members of society to behave in a way that is non-discriminatory, fair, even handed and just, animal-kind overrules these efforts. In the jungle the big male fends of the interlopers to maintain access to the females. Big beasts duel for that prized place at the helm. Human jungles are no different. It is a pretence that we have come a long way from these evolutionary ways. Each spot on the globe has vastly different rules and culture. This entices the frog to make a careful choice as to what mind-body they will receive. Life in many locations will be somewhat different depending on what male/female classification they are likely to get. Being physically stronger and highly attractive has undeniable advantages no matter what pond you find yourself in.

Do what you can to add to your social capital by all means but stop and think about all the time you can waste hoping that you will get what you want. Some things will need financial capital, other things require social capital. It is no easier building a spaceship to visit distant stars as it is to achieve many earthly things. You have been granted a mind, body, and soul and with perseverance, determination, and rancour you can push the boundaries, but only so far.

To Mock

I doubt that any person can go through life without being subjected to some sort of teasing one way or another, usually about something that is personal and unique to them. People enjoy making fun of others and in a way, it helps us unite and get to know one another. It can be used to break down barriers and even lead to political change. When it becomes overly personal and too hurtful, we can look for ways to deal with it.

Whilst it is considered good to educate and condemn the bullies, it is extremely worthwhile teaching the victims some practical methods to handle being teased and taunted. The remedy is in being able to reflect and dispel the attack. With practise it is very easy to do. If someone makes a joke about you then laugh with them, laugh even more than they do. Learn to find it funny yourself and, (a) it won't hurt, (b) people are much less likely to repeat it.

You can be the most respected adored person on the planet and still be the butt of a joke. You will be liked and respected even more if you can contend with a small amount of humour sent in your direction. Are you going to learn to handle it at school or wait until you are in the workplace? Or are you going to put it off until you pass away? When you laugh along with those mocking you, you feel no pain, no anguish, and no hurt. In a sense, it is like an invisible person that you are laughing at. We find ourselves genuinely seeing the funny side, even though we are the one being made fun of. Some over laugh making it appear false. Laugh as much as you would if laughing about someone else except that it is you that it is aimed at.

To keep people making fun of you, you simply need to show displeasure, show that you hate it and feel distraught. Getting annoyed and signalling upset amplifies their attack. It makes them do it every day and at every opportunity.

Someone once said, "if you are not either, odd, weird, eccentric or strange then you are not normal". I replied, "you seem to be all four". I myself am very peculiar in that I am completely normal. We can embrace our characteristics or perpetually take offence when people mockingly point them out.

Those with an odd name will hear the same joke over and over. Each person that comes out with it, thinks they are the first one to do so. A refined response is used. We can think of a funny retaliation as ammo to reflect the humour back on them. Each reflection will be different for each person and modified according to the situation. I used to get irritated by people saying that I spoke too fast. They would keep asking me to repeat what

I had said even though they understood me most of the time. So I would say “Sorry I will s p e a k v e r y s l o o w l y so that your little mind can keep up.” Bouncing it back in this way turns the tables and the hurt is no longer felt. The provocateur is less likely to make such comments again. It works the best when done with a big smile and in a pleasant way. Sit down and consider a reflection for your individual case. Try it out and see how it goes down. Modify it, perfect it and the problem will go away.

People who are under pressure in their work will sometimes release their frustration on weaker individuals. Making fun of others and bullying them provides the mechanism to allay their own ineptitude and difficulties. In the main, ignoring them is usually the most effective policy, but where there is little probability of violence many can find a friendly retort to the jokes.

We are “allowed” to make a joke about someone once. The same joke twice is far less funny. A third time is not mocking but victimising. We have a habit of starting with a bit of a joke and moving towards demonising people. Once = funny, thrice = torment.

Sometimes whole groups have been demonised with people referring to them as sewer rats or lower life forms. The disrespectful comments are played on the radio, spread in the news and more and more people begin to characterise a particular group as being one to be gotten rid of. It is not long before a genocide begins with wholesale killings aplenty.

An organisation that is confident in what it stands for will brush off any flak directed at them. Only when it is relentless do they have real cause to whine about it. Some want it both ways. They want to curtail any hint of derision aimed at them. Simultaneously, they use freedoms of expression to push offensive ideas, ideas which would change the fabric of the nation they are in.

Rumours can be deployed to deal with constant taunting. Ginger haired lads have a greater girth, not longer, greater girth. They are what you might call, fulfilling. Spread an appropriate rumour to highlight the advantage your notable feature gives you.

Humour

Have you ever finished someone else’s sentence? We predict what people are going to say well before they finish a sentence. If they say something that you do not expect, something we did not anticipate, it can be humorous. As a comedian knows all too well, timing is everything. The unexpected part has to arrive in people’s mind at the exact same time as they arrive at a prediction of what they expected you to say. You have to pause to allow them to work out what you might say, then say the

unexpected thing. Hence why jokes you have heard before don't create much laughter, as you know what is coming and can foresee it. Jokes that work best are unpredictable. Some of the most comical jokes come when you are not expecting them, out of the blue.

You can be aroused and more receptive to humour in larger audiences by the contagious nature of comedy. Priming, building an atmosphere, lifting the mood with tomfoolery aids the bonding process between people. A good sense of humour is not so much that someone is making others laugh as such, but that they are radiating confidence and holding people's attention. Those that become the focus of attention are more highly regarded. Humour is a tool to get people to listen. We are competitive animals. Competing for respect, for adoration, for a mating advantage, to improve our social status. Laughing at someone when they fall or spill something on themselves brings people down to earth. Making fun of your date helps not hinders the bonding process, if done right.

It has been suggested that the tickle reflex is a mechanism to aid parents to bond with their children, even though extensive tickling is known to be torturous. People were paid handsomely to take part in a tickle torture challenge to see who could endure the most. It turned out that the challenge was orchestrated by someone that found it sexually arousing.

If you whisper on purpose people will notice and want to know what the secrecy is all about. Fake laughter has a similar effect. It draws attention. You can bug people by laughing to yourself. People care about themselves as always, and fear that you are mocking them. They are relieved to find out that our mind has wandered, falling upon an amusing event in the past unrelated to what is going on around us at the time.

Laughter is therapeutic. We warm to those that smile and make us laugh. We may laugh even when we don't get the joke. It stops us feeling left out. Having a nonplussed face soon after someone has reached the punchline sours the occasion. We can laugh even if we have heard the joke a thousand times or not find it that funny, just to be friendly. Your enemy will use the bully boy tactic - putting on a distinctive nonplussed bemused face on purpose to limit the duration of all your friend's laughter. Dissent.

Farting might be seen as disgusting by some, but it can cross boundaries in its ability to make people smirk. Jokes do not always translate very well into other languages. There is not always the same ambiguity and potential to play on words. Nevertheless, there can be a lot of reliance upon unexpected ways of saying things. That person with the floral dress and long wavy hair is pretty.....ugly.

Children

You need not travel far to have one of the biggest and best adventures of your life, having children. Whilst the first couple of years can be particularly taxing, a bit of an ordeal, after two or so years things for the most part improve dramatically. Your offspring become far more interactive and begin the transition from being a pain to become little helpers. It remains joyous until a small period in their teens when hormones run wild. It is at that point when mind games and other new challenges arise. Those that take a different view, where they see nothing but difficulties at all ages, might want to see if a different approach to their parenting makes life easier. Those who don't have children may have childish adults to contend with and can use the same handling techniques.

We might think we are doing everything the right way when it comes to parenting, but no parent gets everything right. Here we can simply compare your ways to some alternatives. Although most parents do well in a lot of respects, there is often room for improvement. Time, money, circumstances, patience, the battle of wills and countless other things make me sure that there is never an absolute right way in every situation.

A magnet will pick up metals, iron in particular. Try using a magnet to pick up a wine glass and you find it will not work. So, there is a kind of natural order. It is a bit cheeky to apply that principle to children as a way to claim that some things work better. Nevertheless, those seeking ways to make it easier, less stressful, might like something to consider especially when a child is hard to manage. All without being too insistent that there is only one correct way in every circumstance.

In some countries, you move a car a few yards and get given a driving licence. In other places, you sit with an instructor for thirty hours or more and have significant instruction. When it comes to children, we don't have to pass a test before we are allowed to bring a sperm in contact with an egg. If your children are not assets, but liabilities, are you not fishing around with that magnet hoping for it to stick? Typically, we have a parenting style that is similar to that of our own parents. Occasionally we will make a change or two, sometimes shifting from one extreme to another.

There is really only one true aim; to create independent offspring. Children than can manage on their own with less and less support from you. Pretty obvious given that humanity cannot continue otherwise. Whilst for some this is not possible due to physical and mental handicaps, the more they can do for themselves the better, better for them and you.

Patience

We see a child struggle and jump in to assist. This is a mistake. At bath time we can give our little'un some help getting their clothes off. Or we stand back and wait patiently whilst they undress themselves. It can seem like an eternity watching them pull, push, twist, and tug at those clothes. It is a real struggle for them to get them off. That eternity is probably just thirty seconds. The next day it is fifteen seconds. Within a week they do it faster by themselves than if you were helping. It pays to be patient.

A father couldn't do a lot following a bad accident. His son was not going to do everything for him forever more. This father could not walk, far from it. However, the son goaded him to crawl on his hands and knees, day after day. So began a long journey back to independence. Many an onlooker was scornful of the son's methods; they saw it as degrading. The son continued this course regardless, ignoring those that considered it humiliating and rather disrespectful. As time passed the father eventually regained use of his legs and was the better for it. Far better than being stuck in a chair day and night, waited on hand and foot. It is tempting to intervene rather than stand back and allow someone to push through the difficulties by themselves. It feels so much quicker to help. It is much quicker in the short term, but in the long term it becomes a drain on everyone.

There are a lot of similarities between children and people that have had injuries. Physiotherapists encourage recovering patients to do things on their own. Moving forward to regain use of the limbs is only possible through perseverance. It is hard to watch and refrain from taking over. The more you get a child doing things for themselves, the more useful and confident they become. Rather than help their child with their homework, some do it all for them. You tell me what they learn from that.

Options

Giving a child options can make things very messy indeed. In a classic case of telling a child to go to bed, many will say, "Go to bed now or you will not have any sweets tomorrow." This contains the curse of providing an option. The child will probably get the sweets anyway. They may consider it better to stay up late than having a few treats. Your command is being undermined. Simply repeat "go to bed now" over and over and bit-by-bit they edge towards the door, then up to bed. Ignore their protestations and stick to the instruction, no deviation, and no compromise. If they come back down, pick them up, without any discussion and put them back in their room. Repeat until they stay in bed. Options provide choices. The fatal word, the small seemingly innocuous word, 'or' is the one that causes the headache. Or I will

tell your father. Or you will get a smack from your mother when she gets back.

Each time your instructions are disobeyed you edge one step closer to losing all control. People ask nicely - and get ignored. So, they shout and get ignored again. Despite more yelling they still get ignored. Those that never allow their children to get the upper hand in the first place, manage to become authoritative parents. They have authority without resorting to physical reprimands. Authoritative but not akin to a military commander. Patience and persistence - never backing down. The irony is that we like teachers more if they can control the class. Fashionable new age willy-nilly styles might sound progressive but throwing out longstanding tried and tested methods is plain pointless.

Children test you by being obstructive. They have a gadget that you want to use. Having asked them to pass it to you they refuse. To make things as awkward as possible they tuck it under their arms - folded away. You ask them, over and over, to hand it to you. Then you reconsider whether you really need it. Once you ask them for it, you must not back down else they will find untold ways of disobeying your instructions. Things will get progressively worse.

The minute you start letting them win you begin the slide down into eternal grief. Letting them win does not refer to allowing them to have a head start in a board game, which some parents might do to give them hope and more engagement. Instead, it means that if you make a ruling you must stick to it. You must stick to it right through to the end consistently. Too many parents will get exasperated and give up allowing the child to take over. As the years pass, you end up with less and less control and it becomes a bigger challenge trying to be at peace with them.

There is a big difference between being overly controlling and merely setting boundaries. When the line is crossed you reign it in. Why waste time and effort getting them to tidy their bedroom if it is not a fire hazard, just close the door and forget about it.

Some parents will have one child that is a bit more awkward than the rest. Whilst more patience than ever is needed, all children are fundamentally the same and can be nurtured equally well. Make no mistake, no child is so special that standard techniques of handling them do not apply. It is a battle of wills between adult and child. The adult has to dig deep to find the capacity to prevail. Having said that, is it possible that you have a psychopathic super awkward one on your hands? Maybe, but on balance of probabilities it is unlikely.

They can't have what you haven't got. So, when you offer a yellow ice lolly and they start getting into a tantrum because they want

a red one, just take no notice. Why some would go to great lengths to explain that the shop is out of red ones, and this is all you have is perplexing. "Do you want it or not?" introduces them to the realities of life; we can't always get what we want when we want.

Discipline

Hitting, smacking, or aggressively disciplining a child works against you. It benefits no one. Violence breeds more violence. The ugly tone gets passed down the generations. We believe it is acceptable because it is what we experienced during our own childhood. Breaking the chain and trying new tactics is admirable. It is a lot easier than one might think. Vent your anger and frustration elsewhere. No child deserves to be treated harshly. If for example your toddler comes up from behind and bites you unexpectedly, it is common for people to lash out. Reacting in this way is hard to avoid. It is similar to an involuntary response to an insect sting. However, running after them and hitting them is not reasonable. Instinctive reactions may be an exception to the no violence rule, but most people will find themselves in this situation only once or twice in the whole of a child's life.

Some people may witness a child hitting another child then smack the child for doing so. This brings about the assumption in the child's mind that lashing out is acceptable, particularly if you are bigger or stronger than the victim. You will always achieve a more desirable result by communicating calmly; that hitting others won't be tolerated and is unnecessary.

Shouting and raising your voice is best kept for real emergencies, when the house is on fire, not because the bins haven't been emptied. Raising your voice is self-defeating; it becomes normal and gradually less and less effective. Shouting is for instances where there is a major problem. If you talk to them in a quiet manner they will listen more, copy you and shout less too. Everyone gets stressed out. It doesn't get the respect that we wish for. It is more likely to create resentment.

When they are acting badly there is an alternative to shouting "NO, DO NOT DO THAT". Approach them slowly, once up close, right in their face, speak in a firm quiet voice - almost a whisper "No, do not do that." That way shouting remains effective when you reserve it for times such as when you spot them about to grab a pot of boiling water.

Some people have taken the view that discipline is paramount so that the child learns to behave and is always respectful of their elders. However, many many others have demonstrated that it is without doubt, avoidable and damaging on the whole. The question of when the punishment becomes an assault as the child

nears adulthood cannot be answered easily. The violence follows down the line and lots will continue to hit their children as "It did me no harm." It did a great deal of harm. It instilled a false idea that that is the only way to bring people into line. Anyway, are children not 'on your side', are they not a kind of team member?

There is often outrage and upset when news of something nasty has happened to a child, yet there seems to be a perverse acceptance of violent discipline at home. No child is the same and some will be more testing than others, but all are manageable one way or another. I have seen children dodge the swipes of their mothers, learning how to dodge ever quicker rather than learning to behave. It is like the fish in the sea who keep sucking the baby fry into their mouths and spits them back into the nursery area. Once the baby fish learns to be quick enough to avoid getting swallowed, they can then make their way out to open waters.

Children will make mistakes. You did when you were a child. How we respond can either instil confidence or a fear of failure. When a child drops some crockery, you can either scream and shout or ask them to clear it up and get another one. No sighing, no anger, no problem. A child who is trying to help, gets scolded and then frightened to do things. They learn by being a little embarrassed, a bit sorry for their clumsiness rather than worried that whatever they do could lead to some kind of punishment.

One extreme to another

When a child becomes a parent themselves, they often use the same tactics that were used on them in their own childhood. Some however get translated into opposites. You might have felt too restricted in your youth, so you decide to give your own children much more free reign. Food and manners are hot topics in this regard. "I was made to eat a whole lot of horrid things when I was young, so my children can eat as little or as much of whatever they like." You did not like having to sit at the table until you finished a mountain of vegetables, especially ones that were half cooked or soggy. Therefore, you won't put your kids through that. You hated it. It sticks in your mind hence you decide that is one thing you will not put your kids through. People swing from one extreme to the other though, rather than attempting some kind of commendable balance. You need not force them but offer some and encourage them to eat a little. Even a small amount goes a long way towards them getting a healthy diet. If not vegetables, then there are plenty of alternatives that are equally fine. Fret not.

Some parents hate to see children play with their food. Yet experts brought in to get kids to eat more of a variety, begin by

getting them to play and feel the food in their hands. Soon after they have it in their mouths.

What happened to you as a child may have been extreme. Have you got the bravery to see that it had some virtue and can be moderated, brought into balance rather than banished completely?

It can be entertaining watching parents employ different tactics in a restaurant. Some will insist their children sit still, bored, and frustrated. A pacifier of sorts is brought out. Others allow theirs to run amok. Do we mind a child of ours playing under the table? Not at all. Do we mind them telling yet another table of other diners about the snake their dad caught some years ago? Not at all. Unless they are in clear and obvious danger there is nothing wrong with allowing them to roam within reason. Being naturally curious and wanting to explore the surroundings is a desirable feature of all children. We worry about upsetting other diners, but it is the parents that stand out as the most annoying. Making excuses and labelling them with some form of disorder is a great way of masking parental inadequacies.

Children and cats both have curiosity. They have something else in common too. If they want something they will come to you. What neither cats nor children like is being picked when they don't want to be picked up.

"Ignore bad behaviour and tantrums, always respond positively to good behaviour" is a famous motto. When they play up, turn your head away and wait. When the behaviour becomes acceptable, re-interact. Pandering to a child in an ill-behaved state makes things worse, worse forever. Many parents will have great difficulty with this aspect, especially in public places. They are screaming out, so much so that their face turns bright red. The urge to do something to avoid the embarrassment is strong. Let me tell you. If you allow the tantrum to pass, by ignoring them, magic happens. Each tantrum becomes less lengthy. As the weeks pass the tantrum begins and disappears in seconds, for they know it won't work. They want to go; you want to stay. What to do? The easy option is to bend to their wishes. Playing fair is taking them to places they want to go and for them to understand that they need to be tolerant of your wishes too.

It is hard to ignore your child when they are crying and getting steamed up. One must endure it, look away from them. They will calm down eventually for sure. Do not liaise with them whilst they are behaving unacceptably. A child sulking or screaming must not draw your attention. You must, must, must, however, pay them plenty of attention when they are being convivial. As soon as they calm down, re-interact. Reward them if you like.

Sweetness and innocence can disappear and in its place a nightmare child is awoken in what seems like an overnight transformation. Bad bad behaviour, major tantrums. Your home is a stress zone. It is far more than something to garner some attention. Each tactic you try just leads to an escalation. Insults. Resentment. Just laugh at them. Make fun of their actions using the best humour you can devise, but never, ever, display any annoyance. Hard but effective.

Children can be annoying. No, children are annoying. They are on aggregate, fantastic really, but when they are particularly annoying, annoy them back in the exact same way, repeatedly for a good while after. Copy what they do and do it back to them.

Encouragement

For those of us that are not fond of small talk, child talk can drain our will to live. Child talk is rarely thought provoking, rarely insightful nor brim with rewarding treasure. However, children need mountains of face-to-face communication to fulfil their destiny. Listen to them carefully, show genuine interest and they will forever appreciate it. No listen, no glisten.

A child suspected they were being ignored so tried a slightly devious experiment. Each day when they returned home from school, they showed their parents their artwork. Each day the artwork was drawn a little bit worse. Each time they showed it to their parents they got the same, "well done" response. The parents weren't taking a blind bit of notice.

Do we need to be frightened of telling some home truths? You can show respect for their effort and show that you understand that they tried hard. However, fake false praise just delays the pain. Jeremy was drawn by an artist that was told their works was childish when at high school. Drawings of a three-year-old at fourteen. Would it still be shite if they were over praised back then? Who knows? You search, for ages sometimes, to point out what is not too bad in their work. Then give a deserved "well done" for each bit of improvement.

If you knew that your child was not going to reach adulthood, would it change how you approach things? Hopefully, your child and all others will reach a ripe old age, but sadly that is far from guaranteed. Are we investing or over investing in our children, paying a huge price in terms of stress from all that pressure we put on the family. We may find a balance. A fun childhood, lots of time to play, indulging in frivolity whilst still putting in a reasonable amount of study.

An easy ride does not bring about any sense of reward. You do not get a great deal of enjoyment from things that you haven't worked hard for. Which child will look after what they are given?

Which child will appreciate what they have? Will it be one that has been given too much, too easily or one that has worked hard and earned it? A child who saves up for weeks on end for something will enjoy the result much more. They will continue with the notion of save and spend into adulthood.

The trap, the rut. You have worked hard, passed all your exams. You enter the workforce and have an income now. Time to be rewarded. It is so compelling to get things on credit. You can afford the repayments. However, as each new commitment takes a bite out of your wage packet you have less and less freedom. I owe, I owe, so off to work I go. Even if you never exercise the option of being able to take a month out, take a break away, move completely, change track, it is the psychological uplift, the sense that you can, if you wanted to at some point that is magnificent.

A steady reliable stream of income is desirable for companies and governments. They want you to work and they are adept at making you feel guilty if you are not at the coalface. Buy now, pay later is one more way of taking away any feeling of liberation. Regular tax receipts, predictable payments enable them to plan. You are after all a pawn in their grand game. You are conned into believing that it is what you are supposed to do. Work is rewarding, a necessity for our soul, but are we working to tread water or swim where we want?

Each year a certain day is marked out where we feel obliged to buy our children something big and special. The child is past the stage where they play more with the box than the expensive item itself. We might try and persuade a child to value your time more than offerings, but they are not so easy to fob off anymore. Buying them something smaller to avoid going into debt is a far better medium-term solution, but we know that they don't understand that. They see all the other kids in the street getting plenty, so why not them too. We resort to a loan of some sort, paying heaps of interest and have less to spend on them later in the year for sure.

If you want to be cruel to be kind, make your children suffer the pain of waiting. Open an account at your local savings office. Place a small amount of money in it. Allow the child to place the account access document deep inside their toybox, out of your reach. As each week passes you give them some pocket money or chore redemption cash and they can build a small pot to buy something of significance. Do this in place of going into debt to get them something 'they can't live without'. Yes, it will be a disappointment at first, but at least they will see the amount in the account building. It provides something guaranteed. Some promise they will get them what they want next month, but

something crops up and it never materialises. If they have the money growing in the account, it is so much more honest.

Us not them

We may wish our children to be a doctor or an accountant or be the next great inventor. They say that we should be careful about what we wish for. For most, it is adequate to want nothing more for our children than for them to feel satisfied, content, and free. Your parents probably had high hopes for you. That hope may have turned to disappointment. If so, can you provide them with some reassurance that their efforts have been worthwhile? If they understand that you are doing the things that satisfy you then how can they complain.

We see them sleep in until mid-morning and want them in to the world of work, forgetting that young adults need more sleep at this age. You can push and prise, but also live your own life and not have to live it through theirs. We declare that we want them to be happy. The truth can be that we are only happy if they turn out how we imagined they would. Parents think they got away with burdening their children with a lot of pressure. Pressure to abide, to do, to act in a certain way and so on. It comes as a shock when it all comes steaming out in the teens. Most teens will rebel to some degree, but how explosive that will be depends on how much we restricted their release valve.

Do we give unfettered access to the wide scope of knowledge out there? Do we let our children play in an adult arena at an age when they are most unworldly wise and impressionable? There is pornography, violence, incitement, hate, suggestive material all interwoven with useful nuggets of information. You are free to choose what you will permit but think hard about who to blame when they begin to harm themselves in so many ways.

The precedence principle

You give more when in a good state to give. You give more when you are less miserable, less tired and not worn out. Thus, it is always better for your children when you put yourself first. The precedence principle states that you put yourself first. Your partner comes second and the children in third place. How do we justify putting ourselves first? What seems selfish at first turns out to be best for all.

The percentage of money, time, and space at your disposal would be split roughly 40% yourself, 35% your partner and 25% your children. There is no exact optimum. There will be periods where you go off and do something 100% for you. At other times, you will stop everything to address something for the children. It is only an approximate reasonable average.

Precedence ensures that you yourself are content with your life. Your children will still get a reasonable amount. They won't be sucking every last drop of what you have from you. Some wonder what they could have done were it not for the bane of having children. That is not the case if precedence is fairly applied.

Holidays and days out are chosen sometimes to appease the children and sometimes to fulfil the adults. If they complain, so be it. If they whinge about not getting the latest playthings that all their friends have, then so be it. Adults want their own playthings too and resources are limited. When children turn into self-sustaining entities themselves, they can buy whatever they want. They will have years and years to choose how they spend their time.

Sending the children to bed early gives you some quiet time. Knowing that you will get some quiet time makes you much more tolerant of the noise and bustle when the children are around. Balance and flexibility come to the fore. Parents that do lots of things that they find fulfilling end up being better parents too. On the occasions where a child does require extra support you will be in a better frame of mind to provide it. Too much emphasis on you or your partner, neglecting the children is not precedence it is unwholesome. One can allocate time for all. Nights for things for you – just you. Nights out your partner and nights with all the family together. There can be guilt and pressure to spend every night in. We may be doing what we think is right, but if it makes us glum who benefits? A happy home takes precedence to heart, and all get a share.

Some look forward to the day they retire from their job. Plans are drawn up to explore the world. The day arrives along with a letter from the hospital confirming a terminal illness. These stories are commonplace. Did we get our priorities right? Did we skew things too much in our children's favour? We left it too late, and Precedence was not enacted for the benefit of everyone.

When we take a break away, we get time to reflect and think about our lives. We come up with some grand gestures, big changes that show how much we appreciate our family. We consider doing things differently. These commitments fade quickly. It is never long before normal service resumes. We can change little things to improve our home life that are sustainable. Simple pledges. Maybe we stop cooking three separate meals and all sit around the table every day for dinner, banning any distractions too whilst eating. Setting aside one afternoon each week to do something rather than attempting a resolution that isn't keep-able.

Giving

My parents went without a lot to fund our existence. I am sure that is the case in many families. Do we appreciate it? Or is it a pass it on thing? Do we simply do the same for the next generation. When I think about being appreciative, I am glad they paused before taking the first doctor's counsel. They looked at alternatives to a stomach operation which proved to be unnecessary.

We can find ourselves lumbered with the task of looking after both our ageing parents and our own children. Not easy. There are some occasions where parents can manage fine by themselves yet keep calling for assistance. Often for the attention and company rather because they really need any help.

We don't give to receive. We enjoy giving and if we expect nothing back from our children, we won't be disappointed. Those given a lot may expect more and have the confidence to apply for a highly paid job. The belief that they can aim high can come from our parents or be irrespective of them. If you can afford the amount you give, and you are not depriving yourself of the things you and your partner deserve, then why worry. People search for a compromise. Ultimately, a child needs to learn to become independent and the help you give will play a part in this aim. There are always snags in whatever you do.

Step parenting

People might like to think that it shouldn't matter whether the children are biologically yours or not; step parenting is the same as any other parenting. That can be wishful thinking. Take a glance at those families that claim that it is all the same, then as soon as they split up a gulf emerged. Step children commonly desert any former step parents and resort to type.

Taking on the responsibility of a child that is not half yours is always going to be different from one that is. Accepting this is important. The circumstances will be different in each family unit, but step parents have found it easier if they never position themselves as the new mother or father, but simply as a new guardian. This would imply that a step child is in effect a guest in your home. Certain key decisions are left to the biological parents, pulling the rug from beneath the step parent. This can be particularly frustrating. Reasonable ground rules can be set that mirror rules that we expect any guest to follow while in your home. Rules are not the same as ideals. We don't tend to impose our ideals on other people's children that live elsewhere, so perhaps they need not be imposed on step children.

Distancing yourself is not necessarily an inappropriate option in the formative years of a new relationship. Making too much effort

can sometimes end up being counterproductive. Focusing your attention on your partner is the key, involving the step children when they are ready to interact congenially. When the child approaches you in a positive manner you can reciprocate accordingly. When they are pleasant you can be even more pleasant in return. If they are hostile there is no need to retaliate, just let it go. Step children can be fickle, unpredictable and liable to swing from being accommodating to quite awkward, quite quickly. Not too dissimilar to many people in the work place. The danger is in the feeling of failure if you don't get on with the child. You can't be expected to get on well and become friends with everyone that you meet during your life and the same principle applies with step children too.

It is much easier starting a parent-child relationship with someone from birth than it ever will be at a later stage. In the instances where a disciplinary event arises, there is less heartache if you stand aside and let the biological parents deal with the situation. You are entitled to voice your opinions but will rarely gain true authority despite the time you put in over the years. Some do get to a point where they love and regard the child as one of their own, whilst others wonder why they bothered to put so much effort in. Not everyone will consider it as a failure if you don't become best buddies. Some will show appreciation for your sacrifices and dedication, others not so much, the rest may resent you. In fairness children that are biologically half yours can be equally resentful. We tend to blame our parents more than we thank them for trying, doing, and paying for everything.

No matter how distant or how poorly perceived the 'real' mother or father may be, there is always an inclination for the child to want contact with them to some extent. Considering that there can still be love and affection between parent and child within the evilest of people throughout the world, it seems pointless trying to interfere with this bond.

Joe and John turned out to be genetically identical. Their mother painted Joe's toenail to keep check on who is who. But she painted John's toenail by mistake. Joe grew up as John and vice-versa. John had a child with Mary. A few years went by, and they split up. Mary then married Joe (John), and they had a child too. It adds woe to our pride gleaned from passing on our genes for Mary has two children by two fathers who both provided the same genetic input. Is it the knowledge of who provided the sperm or egg that makes all the difference I wonder?

Impartiality

Who might you ask is the best fodder for absorbing our wretched ideals, contradictory inconsistent morals, and hardline politics? Our blessed children of course. Outside the home we struggle to

get our voice heard. We have little impact on the political scene and make very few changes to the way things are run. However, we have been recipients of our thoughts around the dinner table every day. We can make the most of it. Who checks to see if the information we give out is complete and balanced? It is extremely hard to be completely unbiased. It is unavoidable. However, some are frightened of letting their children build their own moral framework. Any fear casts doubt on the robustness of what you practice. If it is as good as you believe it to be, then they will follow it too for sure. There is likely to be untold critics and dissenters of this text and that is a positive. Can you present your beliefs with counter arguments? Few bother, for they are adamant that their beliefs are faultless. We think our political persuasion suits the most. We think it is the fairest and we are therefore keen to promote it.

A planned accident

"We spent ages looking at all the different pushchairs. Each had different features, some we liked while some had bits that were not necessary. We plumped for one that was in our price range and thought it would be best for our needs. We became unstuck however, a few months later when twins were born."

On the one hand we have societies that did not make the connection between having sex and producing babies, on the other we like to plan and control our child rearing down to the finest detail. Many are slow to come to terms with the fact that procreation is not something we can fully control. Some try for months or years to conceive, some never manage at all and there are the many that can't help but breed like rabbits.

Humankind has been known to drown babies without penises and abort for reasons profound and obscure. This is within our control. Mitosis is not so easy to control. Any one of several billion of your brothers or sisters could have been born instead of you. If only that sperm a few millimetres away had got in first, you would have been spared the torture of this amazing life. Add in the fact that if your father, for reasons aplenty, did or did not make that romantic gesture that evening, maybe your mother would have been less willing to lay back and position herself for conception that month. A person may have been planned, but you specifically were not. Maybe in some sci-fi future we could predict the nature of all potential persons, but we would have to go against the certainty of randomness.

We like the idea of settling down and having a certain number of children, but nature gets in the way of that. You can't plan it in the same way as you might organise buying a house and furnishing it. There is more accident than planning when having children. Each child will present a different challenge and whilst

some ideas here have been helpful to many, nothing stops you finding other, better, solutions. Besides, it barely scratches the surface of what comes our way. We don't have to do everything people suggest to the letter. We are free to improvise and accept that perfection is never attainable when it comes to kids. Some are better than others at making excuses for the outcome.

Our childhood shapes us in so many ways. In good ways and not so good. Therapists helping wayward adults start by looking at problems that began in early life. Your parenting will shape your child's destiny. Their destiny is in your hands. It is a big responsibility.

The news that you are to have a child does not always bring joy and jubilation. Many are not exactly thrilled by the prospect of having a child. The birth of a child may not bring instant pleasure and satisfaction. For many the maternal/paternal instinct is quite muted and remains so even as the children get older. Biology doesn't care. If an accident can happen, it will, and there is no need to feel guilty if you are not as enthralled by children as everyone else seems to be. It is hard in some societies to be honest. The fruit from the flower from the tree. You are the one scarifying things, working hard, suffering the stress and worry to ensure the fruit makes it from the flower into something desirable. Then an oik turns up on your doorstep wanting to devour that fruit and reap what you sowed. One way or another it is another that gets the prize. The reveller wins.

A preface to the next chapter

One evening during a round table philosophy discussion we hit upon the question; what is the difference between men and women? We struggled to answer it. Some proffered up the idea that women are more nurturing, but that was soon countered. Men are stronger than women. Maybe, however that and so many things people cite do not apply in every case. There are plenty of women that are stronger than many men. We resort to generalisations, stereotypes. Men are less Women are a bit more Aside from the obvious biological ability to bear children and provide a seed, nothing is as straightforward as we have come to believe. Not all women can have children. Not all men have penises. Thus, I began to debate this extensively and the boy, girls and freaks chapter came to be. If men and women are not as distinct as people make them out to be, why are some things ok for women and not men and vice versa? We want to differentiate *so that we can discriminate*. We adore advantages given to just women or just men, blocking, barring, excluding either men or women.

Boys, Girls and Freaks

Is it a boy or a girl? This is the first question we ask when someone has a baby. If they have a willy, we say it is a boy, if not then we say it is a girl. Once they have been classified as either male or female, we then segregate them in a number of ways. Worse still we lay down rules according to the gender given, rules that are often inconsistent and irrational. There are things we let boys do and not girls and vice versa. All because they have a penis or not.

The question of what sex to assign some can be a bit problematic. Some have a vagina of sorts along with testis and a malformed penis. It is not clear cut whether we can say they are a boy or a girl. We know that the camp we place them in will have an impact on the whole life ahead of them. God does not assign the gender. Instead, a doctor will be brought in to decide as they have had all the specialist schooling. Of course, they are always right every time, without fail and never succumb to human error like the rest of us. Parents have jumped the gun and assigned a sex to their child early on rather than wait for the child to decide for themselves later down the line. Grim tales can be found of babies and toddlers being hastily operated on. Children express a lot of resentment for being damaged. Nothing can put this right. Nothing can rectify it.

These problem cases are seen as rare, rare enough to be dismissed as exceptions and just 'freaks', freaks of nature. Instead of dismissing these so called 'freaks' as irrelevant they can shine a light on the way we view genders. Maybe the harsh boy-girl separation is something we have been doing for so long throughout history that we struggle to get away from it. The real freaks could be those that are ultra-feminine or extremely masculine and that the bulk of the population are a mix of the two.

Give me a reliable definition for a man and a woman. One that works in all cases. We are not debating the concepts of masculinity and femininity. We are asking whether we can state that someone is male or female in a black and white manner rather than just people of the same species. If you were to say girls are more... or boys are more... you have already decided who are boys, who are girls in order to measure. A paradox of sorts.

Most people claim that it is obvious what makes someone male and what makes someone female. In day-to-day affairs visual clues help us help us determine someone's gender. Clothing plays a part, but we feel that we can still distinguish a man from a

woman even when somebody is dressed in drag. A man in women's clothes is still masculine enough to be spotted. The same goes for a woman dressing in a masculine way. They just seem sufficiently masculine or feminine to be separated. Whilst it is not quite so easy with babies as their facial features are far less prominent, we don't make such an issue of it. We don't pay it too much attention and it is pretty much unheard of to request that someone removes their underwear to establish what sex they claim to be. Most will admit however that there have been some occasions where they have come across someone that we are not sure which sex to class them. We notice them and stare for a bit trying to decide. Anything a bit unusual evokes some curiosity.

There are plenty of stereotypes. We think of females typically having slender body shapes, maybe hourglass rather than 'A' frame. Breasts that protrude are seen as the prominent feature of women thus men with man boobs feel awkward. Body hair particularly on the face can mark us out, as does a sweeter softer face. Nevertheless, you will get some wimpy looking boys and 'wouldn't want to meet down a dark alley', strong girls. Men can't have orgasms people cry, but how wrong they are, I can vouch for that. On this note, the sensation when highly turned on, ripples through a large part of the middle of one's body for some time. It is considerably easier to bring about ejaculation than an orgasm though. How do we go about getting sufficient arousal for it to come about? Some need to be relaxed, some must get fizzed up, some need the element of cheekiness / effrontery, some need ripeness and for the rest, heaven knows what. Some would prefer a good book or a glass of wine and leave that aspect of sexual amazement to those with more resolve.

What if a man were to lose his member in a motorcycle accident, is he still a man? If a woman has a hysterectomy, is she still a woman? Half the population in theory can produce children, but this half have issues for many are barren. The potential to bear children frames femininity but is not entirely useful in determining gender conclusively. Although men can't become pregnant, nor can many women. Men are deemed to be the providers of the seed unless they happen to be sterile or have opted for a vasectomy. If rules are going to be made in society, then they need to be fair for all. Lots of legal cases revolve around precise definitions. It has great relevance. Any legal distinction you make between a man and a woman would surely work in all cases if it were to be justified.

If we were to fall back on the chromosomes, the xx/xy, we would think that we would be on safe ground except these have anomalies. The chromosome system is not a two-part system. It comprises numerous registers with each person having their

various components set at different points on the scale. Big built strong alpha male types will have a lot of the settings on the one side yet can still have a few feminine characteristics. At the other end of the spectrum, there will be those that have delicate, sweet, cute feminine bodies, but also some masculine traits as well. If we evaluate all the bands, we can see that on aggregate, people lean to one side of the gender divide. However, nobody is 100% male or female. When we feel hard done by, people will point to someone worse off than us. In the same way, there will always be someone stronger, taller, bigger breasted, more agile



or with a more feminine /masculine voice than us too. And many of them will be put in the other gender box.

The idea of having two separate sexes is highly entrenched in our view of society. One has a hole and the other a peg. Any other viewpoint is swiftly rejected. Thus, from an early age, segregation begins. We have different changing rooms. We like separate toilets except we don't mind in aeroplanes, trains, small shops, and most homes. Some schools think it is wise to have separate classrooms for those with a penis and those without. It is fun to control. People exclude half of society from taking part in a range of activities simply because they have been defined as male or female. Characterised not on performance but on an expected role in child creation and child rearing. Totally illogical and irrational yet violently enforced. Not one country at this point in time has managed to put in place a law that treats all people the same.

Some women are far more feminine than others. Some men are far more masculine than others. Some women are more masculine than others. Some men are more effeminate than others. Some people are more feminine/masculine than others. In our minds we see differences between boys and girls, but these are dwarfed by the much larger number of things that are identical. Count all the body parts that are indistinguishable between the sexes, and you will see only emotive reasons for creating such damning discrimination. I do not propose that we stop seeking the company of contrasting characters. We will always relish and enjoy the sight of opposites. We gravitate towards cute people with exacerbated femininity or masculinity. Hence why some people like to accentuate their femininity by wearing makeup and refraining from becoming too muscular. Or conversely spend hours at the gym toning their physique. Not everyone worries about their looks, for many laughably pretend

to place higher regard on inner beauty. There is a lot of joy to be had in making oneself as feminine or masculine as we like and that is our business and an onlooker's delight.

There can be pressure to conform, to present oneself firmly within one of the categories. Being born without the affirming characteristics that set out our gender identity creates a significant issue within and rejection by those we encounter. Sexual confusion, sex changes and awkward lives materialise. The freaks have difficulties. In truth, we are all freakish, accidents and different. We may have been a product of a planned pregnancy, but our parents did not select us specifically. One can be subject to the same amount of derision for being too fat or too thin whether male or female. We will discriminate when we choose a partner ruling out baldies, shorties and the loud mouthed to name but a few reasons to reject.

It can be advantageous to be beautiful, but sometimes beautiful people can be hampered by the fear of competition. An employee will use a different filtering mechanism to whittle down candidates to present to the boss than the boss might themselves. Staff might be in fear of being overshadowed by new attractive people coming on to the scene. Some are less inclined to give a petite figure a chance in something like the construction industry. That is despite the measurable distinctions in actual performance being minimal when timed. Suitability is only truly proven once someone has been in the job for a while and preconceptions get eroded. Female warriors have been as deadly as any others in conflicts of the past. By and large there are as many capable people classed as women as there are classed as men. Make no mistake about it, I could find some people who you would call women to face off and challenge any typical bunch of those you call men.

People have different hormone ratios and that intensifies their appearance. It gives rise to more body hair, being more prone to aggression and a greater ability to compete. Testosterone can be the deciding factor. It can be used as a way of dividing the human race into the two sexes, fair enough. If you want to decide if your child is a boy or a girl, you must wait until they are about 10 years old and see a chemist to measure their testosterone level.

Those most proficient at a sport, the champions, or those that are the best at maths seem to be in the male category. Nevertheless, the difference is marginal, crucial to come top, but the females do not lag that far behind. It is only a small number that make up the elite, most people have average abilities. Take a random sample and you will see no major difference between the sexes. Besides, the best one or two doctors can't be on all the hospital wards right across the country. The top leagues would have a

good proportion of female participants there by merit if the world lost its bias. Where there is no exclusion, there is little difference in performance between the so-called sexes. Tradition holds people back rather than lack of competence.

We can hunt for sections of our genes that can spell out what sex we are, but it will still come down to human interpretation. We can highlight types that belong more to the male or female category such as those with the obsessiveness trait. However, both men and women can be prone to focusing heavily on one subject for a long time. Whether it is nurturing, caring, loving, loathing, desiring or any form of human emotion we can never place them higher or lower on just one gender. Anything a boy feels will be felt by many girls too.

A nation that counts people as people and not as either male or female has no interest in making anyone change how they label themselves. It would end the denial of access to anything based on a gender discrimination. The only time we would be stopped from doing something is if we were underage or truly incompetent. There is no need to banish Mr/Mrs/Ms etc from the diction. In English, there is plenty to take umbrage at with the masculine element in man/woman, male/female, lad/lady, prince/princess, count/countess, and he/she and so forth. We can replace he/she/her/him with they and them. Things become rather stilted and constrained though. It is harder to write without these pronouns. Despite everything, the freedom to write how we want is paramount. So, you write how you like and address people as they wish to be addressed.

As with any new idea, things can be taken too far. Providing fairness, equal chances, and the same respect for all, need not become a deterrent from expressing femininity / masculinity. It is all too easy to make everyone feel obliged to dress neutrally and to address each other in the exact same way. This very dark path would stifle our freedom to take into account the treasures of human life. I adore a green garden but wouldn't dream of chopping every flower head off to keep it green, green, green. Give each plant the water and sunshine they need, let the colours and variety flourish, please. Give everyone the same opportunity to work, to serve and to compete whilst still allowing them to express their masculinity/femininity as they so desire.

I gave my baby daughter a range of mechanical toys to play with. I taught her how to plumb, lay bricks, set tiles, wire electrical things and so on. This had a huge impact on how she developed. She became most useful to our family. You can shift cultural norms and remove sex bias in the hope of attaining equality, but equality has to start at birth.

Some will always see men and women as a separate species. These people will never change their mind. Females have a cervix and males do not. There is more to it than that. For example, females usually have a different vocal tone. You can hear their voice and categorise reliably that way alone. Face shape and features of someone's body give you sufficient cause to classify someone as male or female. Whether you focus on one thing such as the presence of a cervix to categorise or take many things into account I will tell you this. The only reason you want to differentiate is so that you can discriminate.

Revulsion

Many people will shudder at the thought of having intimacy with someone they consider to be of the same sex as them. They find it more abhorrent than having sex with someone aged or disfigured or jolly unattractive. The written and unwritten guidelines of acceptable sexual behaviour runs deep. A masculine individual will go out with someone adorably flat chested so long as there is assurance about them having distinct genitalia. We can look at someone and say that we find them attractive, but as soon as we find out that we are wrong in what gender we thought they were, we recoil in horror. The distaste is quite heartfelt.

Most people will opt for someone of their favoured type. We fall in love with someone. A person that gels. It is a somebody that suits you. Under no account does it suggest that we change our behaviour, popularise it or even promote trying things with different sorts. The world will not come to an end because some people are in iso-sexual relationships. There will always be enough men and women living together having children for mankind to continue. Those that play no role in procreation still make a contribution to the economy and peace of a nation. Observe a field full of rabbits that are humping one another day and night. They are all at it irrespective of what genitalia they each have. Of the 40 that can get pregnant 40 will get pregnant. Nature has no intentions only consequences.

Anal sex is often regarded as indecent. This can be the principal reason why people condemn same sex unions. Yet a surprisingly high number of male-female couples have tried it. A lot more than people acknowledge. Notwithstanding a significant proportion of iso-sexual lovers form long-term intimate relationships without ever penetrating the other. Most are more than content doing other things. It is not a fear of the potential health risks, but simply because they have no wish to do so. Thus, to criticise the pairing on the basis that we find that aspect repugnant is unfair if many never bugger one another.

Buggery is deemed indecent primarily because it is inserting into an area that the body has set aside for waste disposal. Unhygienic

it may be, but the penis also discharges buckets of waste urine daily. Spreading food on a body and licking it off is not exactly hygienic either. The pathogens in excrement are exceeding dangerous though. One could argue that there are countless dangers in all kinds of sexual activity as there are countless dangers in many other activities non-sexual in nature, but anal sex comes with unique risks attached. A good proportion of homosexuals find it repellent.

At your first day in your new job, you are introduced to your teammates. "This is Hilda the heterosexual." "Over there we have Paul the polite one who likes tickling and face sitting." "Sarah on your left once tried the doggy position but prefers to be on top most of the time." "Justine is a part time dominatrix with her own fully kitted out dungeon." In reality, we keep our own sexual forays close to our chests and don't talk much about other people's *unless* it's iso-sexual.

Oral sex in all manner of positions is practiced between a whole range of deviants. It is hard to argue that gender is important in this instance. It makes no odds what you have down below when kissing or caressing or at what angle or what posture. Sex for the sake of sexual gratification is commonplace. Sex during pregnancy. Sex on one's own. Sex for fun. Sex for thrills. Sex even in the hope of replicating. Maybe we could limit sex to once a month during ovulation and never again after or when we have no motive of making babies. Is it a sin, is it immoral for couples who know that they are infertile to have sex with each other? There have been many a long-lasting romance where neither saw one another naked. It is hard to imagine not seeing your partner in their birthday suit. Just making do with some fumbling under the blankets. Many would discreetly lift what was necessary and in a few fleeting moments the task was done. How different, different times are.

Some have said, "If only they tried harder, with those of the opposite sex, they would find that they like it." One could argue that if one tried bestiality they might like that too if they tried it for long enough. Most are quite sure that having intercourse with a goat is not for them without needing to go to a farm and give it a go. Whilst discovery is key to finding the right person, one finds the general type that they are attracted to at an early age and that doesn't fundamentally change.

The most foolish of fools think that someone can choose or change their sexuality. We home in on what appeals to us the most as we reach our teens. Some have suggested that people can be converted, turned straight, by all kinds of therapies. They think it is akin to some kind of addiction that can be fixed. Sadly,

your preferences are hardwired into you. Not exactly sad, as to you it all seems perfectly natural.

Relationships

Relationships in our youth are for sex. Relationships in our twenties and thirties are for children. Then when we are old, we have relationships for companionship. Wrong. Companionship is pivotal whatever your age. Sex can be crucial and poignant right up to death. As for children, that depends on biology.

Femininity is aligned with vulnerability and vulnerability is an attractive trait sought by many masculine characters. Far more attractive than highly confident self-sufficient persons. This can be the reason some individuals spend many years being single. We can woo by portraying ourselves as in need of help and appearing vulnerable. Or shoo away unwanted advances by portraying ourselves as confident and quite capable. On the other side of the coin are those who present themselves as a protector, protecting but not quashing their partner. Sometimes we have to put on a pretence to draw people in whether it is as a male or female figure. Love is a mesmerizing game in the game of life.

Some worry that getting with someone could lead to a lot of heartache if it doesn't work out. All relationships are dead end. They end at death or when the two of you fall out. If you want a benign, dull, uninspiring, uneventful, low impact, safe, safe, safe way of life, then don't get romantically involved with someone else. Don't live. Life is just not as predictable as fortune tellers make out. Any number of mishaps might be lying in wait today tomorrow or in the coming years. After such events people change their views and adapt their outlook. Astute ones do so prior. The fortunate couples feel at ease with each other, comfortable together and have an ability to tolerate their partner's many faults and failings.

People do change – to some extent. They relax their pretence. They begin to accept who they really are. They shake off all the shackles, ridding themselves of the pressures and expectations people have of them. You move towards the real you that was always there, latent, and disguised. Relationships therefore come under strain as the person no longer resembles what you thought they were.

The end of a relationship can bring about feelings identical to a death. One can grieve for a long while after. Potentially we suffer grief that stays with us forever more. Time does not always heal. Only getting with someone, that is on aggregate better, softens the blow. If the pair of you were always arguing and not getting on well, then that is a different matter. You won't be staying

together for the children but separating so that the children need not endure more conflict.

The sex was good, the courting went superbly. Now your mind is focusing on what was obvious from the start. You have little in common. One wants to go out all the time, the other wants to stop in. Sound familiar? The only question one needs to ask is this. Do I want to carry on like this for another twenty+ years? The world is a mess romantically. Some have managed to find and secure the perfect one. Perfect for each other that is. They are the lucky few. Many are making do. Some work together in the same business plus hold things together by setting aside an evening or two, a day or two, to habitually do things with one another. Dissatisfaction hasn't set in. Not yet. When it does, they have a conundrum to mull over. Splitting up will affect the good days with the extended family. I may end up being single for the rest of time. And many do find themselves living solo. They acknowledge the advantages. There are on aggregate more advantages to being in a relationship though.

Each relationship is a hotchpotch of good and bad with too many variations to generalise. Putting the absolute no no's aside, violence, coercive control etc we have to accept all partners are problematic. You are problematic too. List your own detrimental features first. Strength does not arise from coping with being a singleton, but from making a worthwhile relationship work.

Monogamy is a popular ideal, although some can have more than one relationship running concurrently with purportedly few side effects. Bigamy is outlawed in many countries. This is an example of the state meddling with our personal affairs. Many will see it as none of anyone else's business. That is unless there is some deception involved and they feel the need to inform the duped party. Do you pay attention to all the other monkeys frolicking in the trees or cats in your garden making long term bonds to multiple partners? What is the moral basis for limiting the number of wedded partners, nothing substantial I suspect? Having another partner that everyone concerned knows about is less of a minefield than the abundant affairs that take place in secret.

Affairs are thrilling, exciting, something fresh. They can be a new beginning, sometimes. We connive, we battle to keep things a secret. Some face the cost of being unfaithful. There is a significant chance of catching a disease. We lose respect from members of our family. Whilst you can sign any form or swear allegiance to someone, you can go against this promise fairly easily. The only real commitment one can make is when you actively decide to have children, for they can be a lifelong part of your life regardless of the success of your partnerships.

Emotional infidelity can be as destructive if not more so than a physical affair. It can also be harder to forgive, forget and get over. Alarm bells start to ring when someone confides in others rather than share their problems with their partner first. Trust is like a pane of glass, once shattered it is never the same again. You can refashion it like a stained-glass window to keep out the cold, but it doesn't always replace what was once there. When offspring arrive some resentment and jealousy can set in. Most couples see the importance of finding the space in their routine to ensure that intimacy is not neglected. As for jealousy regarding a former partner, our skin gets replaced every two years. Bi-annually we become biological virgins again. You will never be as good in some respects as those that went before you, but there is a reason why they are with you now and that and that alone is the only thing of importance.

Some people split up having messed up their relationship. They see their children only part time and have entered a state of having nothing to lose. They do not care about preserving your relationship, a relationship that is going well. They will find or create the opportunity to damage and steal from it. It is not as if they want to take your partner from you and live happily ever after. Instead, it is to have sex and walk off laughing. How do we protect ourselves from such venomous scum? You can see the virtue of keeping tabs and being guarded. Guarding in a number of ways which only those that have had to deal with the problem understand. Having a ready store of the element in all life triple bonded with the main component of air is one kind of tempting solution. However, "go away", "stay away" is the most customary tool. Like mosquitoes lurking and waiting for you to stop fidgeting, swat one and think that is the end of it, for another to crawl through an unforeseen gap.

We may shrug and not think too much about a sexual disease befalling us. The unwary have found the pain gets so bad that they clap their most precious end, hard, to eject the fetid mucus. Having to do such a thing because of an unfaithful mate makes it all the more grating.

It is hard to deny the importance of feeling comfortable and relaxed with your partner; where you can be yourself and behave according to your nature. Nothing aggravates the soul more than having to 'walk on eggshells', always frightened to say the wrong thing or be cautious in too many ways. I learned to make fun of the bad moods with persistent jokes and comedic goading. This relieved the pressure and worked for me. Compatibility is about knowing that people are far from perfect and finding someone with a set of imperfections that you can accommodate. We have a few quirks which our partners treasure for their uniqueness. If

you consider your partner's weaknesses to be sufferable then looking elsewhere would not be quite so recommendable. However, people can easily get distracted by the longing for a change. As the years pass, regardless of how well people get on with one another, a little boredom can set in. A switch to another partner or a period alone can appear very appealing. We can be so accustomed to the way our relationship works that we don't add up all the plusses. It is only when we begin a search for a new partner that we realise what we lost.

There is no clear formula for maintaining harmonious relationships. We each have things that matter and things that don't. If our partner is significantly taller than us, does it make it harder to stand one's ground? Do we look for complementary characteristics, a submissive and the assertive? As for love, it is not so much romanticism and unyielding in its definition, it stems from getting to know someone. We might have a love of all humanity, but the more you know someone the more love we feel. The people you love the most are those that you know well. Their soul, their characteristics will be in keeping with your preferences.

It is impossible to be absorbed by the problems of everyone the world over, there are billions of them. We love and care for those that we are most familiar with. Lots of people get in trouble. We feel the most pain for those that we are most heavily associated with. This doesn't provide a good excuse to ignore the difficulties of everyone who isn't a friend or relative but motivates us to assist in small ways whenever it is practical.

Teenagers wanting to get noticed, teenagers that want to receive attention can be a little mean or nasty towards those they fancy. The way we behave sometimes, is opposite to what we might expect. We encounter people that are a little offish, or rude and not consider whether we have caught them at a bad time. They may be in the middle of a bereavement and act very differently on another occasion. Most people out there deserve more than one chance and at some point, it is bound to be you too. "Friends come and go, enemies accumulate." You will feel stupid when you have an accident, and a foe comes to your aid.

"If only everyone was like me the world would be a better place." This belief is further from the truth than can possibly be. Thank heavens, thank your god, thank anything you like that we are not all so stilted and so similar. There are many a person who passes way beyond the mid-life age marker retaining no clue whatsoever of what or how other people think. Not grasping that other people have different desires and look for different things is the ugly side of the ignorance paradox.

Autism

There is an apple on the table. Infront of the apple is a vase. The vase blocks your view of the apple. The person on the other side of the table can see the apple. Now most people understand that whilst they can see the apple other people can't if they are sitting with the vase in the way. Autistic people are different. They think that as they can see the apple, everyone else can too. This is a way to understand an aspect of autism. The inability to see and understand things from another person's point of view. Translate that to our inability to understand why other people enjoy different sexual activities.

If you consider bondage, handcuffs, whips, thigh high boots, firemen's outfits and so on as items of despicable deviancy then you have a form of autism. You will have an undeveloped acquaintance of the diversity of humanity and its disparate nature. You would be perplexed by why someone would want to dress in adult sized nappies or be trampled on or urinated over for pleasure. The range of activities that excite us is mind boggling. Watching someone pop balloons in high heels turns some people on. There are countless things that you wouldn't think of that have a connection with sexual activity. There are also a good few who have no interest in sex whatsoever. The more you can accept that others like to partake in such activities or not, the less autistic you are. We all lie somewhere on the autistic spectrum.

Even the most highly autistic souls can be rather happy and contented. They find life just as rewarding as anyone else. This observation inspired the title of this text. They may have uncountable frustrations. They may not be able to tell us what they want at times, but by no means does it imply that their life is any less satisfactory. Autism is an attribute, not necessarily a disability.

One fine chap had a pronounced level of autism. People tried hard with him. They tried asking questions. They tried to involve him, but never got much back. Talking with him felt rather awkward. He was quiet, shy, and reserved. One day he wrote some prose and gave it to his work colleagues. They were taken aback by his emotive writing. With words on paper, he explained how he appreciated the conversations immensely. Face to face contact no matter how stilted is adored by most as is simple human presence.

The satisfaction of sex

Some sex is love making. Some is pure lust. Some is exploring sensuality, and some seek an insight into sensing - sensory discovery using the animal machine. Technically these four things,

love making, lust, sensuality and sensing are distinct, but they invariably become mixed and blurred. Whatever the case all forms of sexual activity is predominantly satisfying.

The missionary position is probably a most underrated way of bonding, but few are content with this and nothing more. We want more but to get more, we need to broach the subject with our partner. That can be difficult. Many will introduce the ideas a little at a time and try to share an experimental adventure. Talking about what we like in our sex lives is particularly difficult if what you crave seems at odds with everyone else. It may be popular to mention the state and size of peoples' breasts in one culture or the bums in another. It becomes acceptable to mention pert backsides, firm breasts, and fine abs in your locality, but many will brush aside other likes as odd fetishes. A fetish, propensity, penchant, and desire are all interchangeable words in this realm.

No fetish is strange to the practitioner, only to ignorant outsiders. An open admission that we adore breasts or bottoms is just as much a fetish as anything else, it is a strong desire and attraction to them. Nobody is shocked when you join this acceptable club. You may get some giggles and grins when you bring up blow jobs or banging upside down in a lift but any hint of cross dressing, sadomasochism etc. and you can be considered, un-rightly, to be a creepy weirdo. Make no mistake about it, what people claim to *just do* is likely to be limited in truth. Some may keep things simple but are too dull to try more to get to the core of what they really like. They would rather let it fester. They have the wish but contain the desire to avoid being thought of as abnormal. There is of course no need to think that your plain activities are inadequate. Nor is there any need to let anyone outside of your private intimate trusting relationship know what turns you on. It is much easier to talk about something you regard as sexy and having a fetish for if it weren't for all the disapproving critics. A zookeeper knows this all too well. No matter how odd your fantasy is, you will find that plenty of others that share those same fantasies as you. Some sexual activities can be more prolific than others of course. Some sports are very popular other less so. Hence sport and sex have a parallel.

Some find a great partner, and all seems well until they get asked to perform a mighty odd thing. To pick one as an example, eeny meeny miny moe; urinating. Holy molly, they are asking to be pissed on. How on earth can that be any fun? Now we are back to autism and not getting what someone likes. So, what to do? The main test is this; does it damage or cause pain to the doer? Maybe it will make a right mess of the carpets, but no they are happy for this to be done in the bath. Could there be some physiological harm done to the doer? That is doubtful. To urinate one needs to

drink, so a potential problem, but minor unless it is in large volumes. Does it get in the way of 'normal' sexual activities? Can it be done in the privacy of the home or hotel room?

We question whether it would be best to terminate this relationship. Will the next person be even more strange? Will they be violent? Will they be a super spendthrift leading to bailiff visits each week? Do I just say no and let it lie, hoping that it will go away, and they contain their desires? Well, there is selfish and there is co-considerational selfishness. You will feel good about yourself when you give what someone wants. What you might read in advice columns is biased. People that you know try to present a perfect image. Things they don't want you to find out are hidden from view. It is therefore difficult to establish what the majority really think is acceptable.

In most cases, there is rarely a request for role reversal. Someone might want to be trampled on but not the other way around. If they ask if they can trample on you, it becomes a different issue. As a person doing the trampling, your greatest risk is if you stumble and fall off. If you tread in the wrong place, it is not you that gets hurt. Satisfying sexual cravings and desires often take a lot of effort. Relationships require effort. Sexual fun and games will go a lot more smoothly if we discuss, agree, and obtain genuine unpressured consent beforehand. Those that get the intimacy that they hunger for, cherish their relationship the most. Who looks elsewhere when satisfied with what you have at home?

The sexual drive we have can vary somewhat. It is as normal to have no interest in sex as it is to crave it constantly. It takes dedication to graciously give when you are not in the mood, especially when it feels a chore but is thoroughly appreciated by those that want it more. Sometimes you can repay the favour in other ways rather than take it for granted. Sulking rarely works. Being super nice when you want something is usually more fruitful. Most are obliging when someone is being so very pleasant. We might like to think people will feel guilty at letting you stew, but they don't. They simply harden to it. If you are waiting for your partner to get something needed for an activity, you may end up waiting forever. Forget the silliness, forget dropping hints, go forth and sort it.

We can share the lead in dancing. We can share the driving. We can share the lead in sex too. Sometimes we can be selfish and focus on our own pleasure. We can take it in turns to have all the attention. The one getting the most joy ought to ebb and flow.

As we proceed, we find more and more variations. Some things emerge as more of a success than others. There are endless avenues to test out, each offering their own riches. You will never

reach a nirvana. Rather, highs and lows with peaks of joy. To not want more is to not live to the full. Contentment is temporary. It is the dynamic changing experiences that are gratifying and rewarding.

Someone new on the scene makes us swoon. We are fixated. A few days later we see someone else, and they become the new attraction. On it goes. It is not that each person is a bit nicer, but we have a hardwired stimulus system that sparks into life the moment a new opportunity presents itself. Some find themselves endlessly searching for more. This relentless search for a new slant gets out of hand. A reset can fix those who struggle to get it up without having to go to ever more extreme lengths to bring about arousal. People take a complete break. A break from pornography. A break from one-night stands, then after a period of abstinence go back to where they first begun. They return to the core of what excited them in the beginning.

You can stand on a cliff edge or hang from a beam high in the sky and get a thrill. Likewise, in sex we can take ourselves close to the limit without being disfigured or killed. Few want to succumb to any actual real harm. The danger provides the turn on. Many feel emancipated when tied up and at the mercy of a master/mistress. Relinquishing control is freeing. It provides a contrast to other areas of life. Not all of it is real, it can be played out in a realistic manner to connive the senses. It is the thought of being in danger that provides the draw. Very few will want to be permanently injured. A seedy prostitute, dirty and disgusting can be fantasied about. You don't really want an infection, but the risky nature of some activities is alluring.

Toying with artificial attire features a lot in the realms of modern sexual activities. Given that so many fetishes involve something plastic we wonder what went on, where some people got their kicks before such items were invented. This gets to the heart of the matter for it is not the plastic item itself that creates the excitement, but the effect it has on the visuality of the body. The cleavage, the hint of what is available attracts as often as the forbidden fruit. The objects enhance and pronounce the beguiling features of the character. The colour contrast at the junction of skin meeting accoutrement features large. Couple this with the partially hidden areas, the cleavage, and the eyes linger for ages.

Humans are human, far from perfect models we conjure up in our imagination. Dimples, spots, marks, weight in places that we don't want. Veins which push the life force around, protruding rather than held back in tight young skin. We can keep our focus on the good bits, the pleasing aspects.

They say that one finds it best to avoid having sex somewhere where you wouldn't sleep. It may well be that your thrilling idea

pans out to be rather uncomfortable. The poke of the thorns and sand in your genitalia drowns out the pleasure.

People pretend in the popularity game. They pretend in the sex scene too. They make things sound exciting. When you try it yourself, you find it rather unexciting. People make noises that they think will impress their partner. Those noises may turn out to be rather distracting and, in many cases rather annoying. You can pretend to enjoy it if it is a means to an end.

Nakedness has its own beauty, as does a genuine body. Makeup and clothing can hide some blemishes, things we might be less proud of. Most people look more attractive wearing something than when naked, even nubile people in their prime. In my view, and this is just my personal opinion, dressing up works best when the look is balanced between raw and artificial.

Magazines of yesteryear had sections with pictures sent in by the readers. Most were of low quality, grainy and poorly produced. The photographs were not altered in any way. Yet the popularity was enormous. The down-to-earth, candid nature stimulated the naughty side of us. Contrast this with the perfection of the professional shoot and we can see that not all are wedded to clinical clean images. Real is a turn on.

How would you as a director of a porn movie show the ejaculation? You don't have a borescope so can't let the viewers see the spurting inside. All you have is a bit of a grunt noise from the actor. So, to spice things up visually you ask them to spunk onto the ladies face or breasts. They do it for the film rather than because it is more enjoyable. We find ourselves copying what we see other people doing thinking that our partner will be impressed by it and that it gives us kudos with our friends. Who has the confidence to stick to what they like rather than succumb to what other people think is great? We can wrongly assume our lover will be thrilled by things we see elsewhere. A lot appears more glamorous than it really is.

The difference between self-stimulation and having other parties perform sexual play with you is enormous. One is electric and intense the other rather forgettable. Masturbation provides relief and keeps you healthy, but it has nothing like the same intensity as doing things with another person. Some do lie on top of full-sized dolls, but humanness is bewitching and irreplaceable. The body is everything. It can be presented at its best by the right kind of lighting. Clever bar owners will install blue lighting to keep you awake and use other subtle colours to flatter. You may have been somewhat unsettled by the difference in someone's looks when outside of the club and not inebriated enough to override the concern. Most people can add a touch of sparkle and improve their appeal with a plethora of adornments, simple or complex. It

is the ability to exaggerate the femininity or masculinity that provides the treasure for the senses.

We are certainly drawn towards different things. Where one person's idea of attractive can be unattractive, repelling even to another. Some see no limit to how fat someone could be, the more the better, whereas others like rake thin for example. With so many variations of hair and skin colour, to height and proportion to style and presentation, beauty in this sense is personal. In many cases, we meet somebody and then the beauty seeps out and attraction steadily builds. There is not a distinct correlation between a person's absolute beauty and wanting to marry them. Someone who has damage may deviate even further from the mathematical ideal and be less pleasing to the eye. Where damage is not symmetrical, perhaps one side of the face has an injury, the instinctive repellence becomes even greater. We need to remind ourselves that some quirks can be attractive to many people and even preferred to a numerically aligned body.

It takes practice to get good at something. That applies to all skills of the mind including facial recognition. Lack of facial recognition practice with faces of foreign ancestry means they can all look the same. The more you see the better trained you become to distinguish one from another. There are some that can't recognise faces at all, prosopagnosia, and presumably there will be a tiny minority that can't gauge beauty. This universal beauty that most can appreciate, irrespective of the creed and colour of the subject, comes from magical numbers derived from the series: 0 1 1 2 3 5 8 13 21 34 55... Divide any two adjacent numbers and it heads towards 1.618, the golden ratio. One need not measure with a ruler. One need not worry too much about where to measure from or to. Our eyes can approximate rather well. We can gauge the beauty from different angles and decide what looks closest to the beauty sweet spot.

We have a natural curiosity for anything unusual, so will stare at those that look different. This can make those with a blotch on their face feel rather uncomfortable. Some apply makeup with a trowel to hide the marking. Others see themselves as having a beauty mark and live with it joyously. Our attitude towards it makes all the difference. Some do not see it as a negative. When someone stares at you there are two options. Either carry on feeling uncomfortable or smile back at them showing a couldn't care less attitude. Ponder about those that get stared at because of their fame. You may wish the issue didn't exist, but a change of thinking makes it much easier to cope with. Some people have mad piercings and wear wild clothes to increase the attention they get and stand out. Unlike you, they had a choice in the matter, but you can copy their indifference to how people react.

We can all be repelled by something diseased and disturbing. Our prejudice towards those with startling, uncommon features erodes once we become accustomed to them. Rather than blaming and shaming people for their hostility and repulsion, we can understand that there is a natural instinct to shy away from any unusual form. It is simple curiosity, and we know that to be a basic feature of all people. We steer clear of things that we perceive to be dangerous. The greater the interaction these people have in a community the more they will be accepted. The more normal you act, the more normally you will be treated and the less odd looks you will get.

Do we have similar sexual habits? To answer this question hundreds of people we interviewed. They expected to find that people were basically the same. However, every rule of thumb was thrown out of the window. The stereotypes were wrong, the presumptions were wrong, the beliefs were wrong. There was no common theme. There were no norms. No assertions held up. One person being interviewed claimed that they could go from flaccid to discharge in ten seconds. The interviewers were in disbelief, saying that was not possible. The person dropped their trousers showing a limp penis. Then after some vigorous hand action they indeed discharged in ten seconds. Some like to think that it takes longer for girls to climax than the boys, but that is not strictly true. It is all depends on the individual rather than the type of genitalia we have. Those that have hang ups and fears of premature ejaculation need only consider taking a short rest and go a second time. They will usually take longer to finish in the following bout. We hear that it is not the size but what you do with it that counts. In truth it is what you do with your fingers that is often prized the most. Often, not always. The same size penis will look much bigger on a smaller person than a large person. Satisfaction can come from connection rather than size of breasts, penis, midriff, biceps etc. Confidence is critical and where you may lack some in some areas you can compensate using flattery, compliments, niceties, respect and being attentive.

The time spent asleep is used by the body to maintain itself, leading to wet dreams and waking up, up. Circulation doubles when erect, increasing the essential repairing blood flow. Far from doing any harm, masturbating regularly, even on a daily basis is highly recommended. It is not uncommon to continue doing so despite having an exemplary sex life with someone else. It is pleasurable primarily because it is a required function of the body to maintain its health. Added to that, regular self-induced climaxes help you discover and examine what you find favourable, both mentally and physically whatever the gender you claim to be. You can convey your favourite methods to a partner far more effectively when you have scrutinised your own

mind and body. Closing one's eyes and lusting brings no shame only inappropriate actions are devilment. Like all things in life, moderation is the aim, worrying about too much or too little is only necessary at the extremes. Being abnormal could imply you are rare. Rare is gold. Common is silver. You are worth your weight in respect you have for others not respect you insist others give you.

Procreation

From time to time, you will come across a family with one or more of the children standing out a little, thus putting the paternity into question. Rather than upsetting the apple cart you say nothing. Cuckolding seems to be prevalent in more than just the bird species. There is a devious mechanism at work, surreptitious and inspired. You could be having sex with your partner every night and no conception, but the extra single event with someone else hits bang on. The egg is held at the top of the tube in a waiting state for a short while and can be subconsciously released spontaneously to fuse with the seed of an interloper. We may consider the individual to be of fine breeding material but unlikely to hang around for years providing for the child. In truth it is invariably someone that is a major turn on. The one with the high calibre seed provides the nature and the long-term partner provides the long period of nurture. Rather than an affair, it is more often than not, a single one-off brief encounter that is not even consciously controlled. The cohabitee is unlikely to suspect a thing. Biology has gone down a path of genius that only becomes unravelled in the modern must behave society. Our world can fall apart once we uncover truths. Where one hasn't made an input in the genes, they can more than compensate by the years of effort nurturing and adding to a child's development. Those bringing children up impart ideas and show them things that form a massive part of their character. I will reiterate this too; a child is only half yours genetically - half your partners. A grandchild a quarter and so on until ten generations later it becomes less than a thousandth of you left.

Whilst biology enables children to have children, some adults leave it and leave it thinking it will be fine. It is not always fine. They assumed incorrectly that they will be able to have a child later in life. The probability of success drops as each year passes. Birth defects, miscarriages and other problems rise the older we as parents become. Circumstances is all. We may have more energy when we are younger, but in our youth, we are most likely working hard, building a home and under strain. With so many things to attend to we have less time to devote to our children. This can create a bitterness not found by those that leave child

rearing until much later in life. Perhaps that is why we can take on the role of a grandparent in such a relaxed way too.

One child per thousand sexual acts

The fairy-tale goes something like this: Boy meets girl. They fall in love. They get married and consummate it. From that point on they only have sex each time they want another child. The sex is for nothing more than that required to procreate. The fairy-tale is supported by tradition and abides to long held customs. This fairy-tale is fictitious and fanciful. It belies palpability in the real world. A much more reasoned guess is that a typical individual may have sex of some sort around two thousand times, maybe more maybe less. Whilst this might be a bit of a generalisation, you can come to this kind of calculation by adding up every night in the first year of getting together with every other night the year after and the once or so a week thereafter. If you include all the healthy masturbation before during and after any relationship, the total is truly justified. We have sex thousands of times yet the number of children we have can be counted on one hand. Now an ardent contraceptive avoiding couple may have a quantity of children that reaches double figures. But if you take into account the couples that have none, you find the average number of children per couple is closer to two. So, one child per thousand times you have sex. If we have sex a thousand times, and in that time only produce one child, it is farcical to claim that the principal reason we have sex is to multiply. Sex is for fun. Sex is for pleasure. Any offspring arising is incidental.

Sexual attraction brings us together; we and all the other animals have this primitive natural inclination. The scent from hormones can trigger and arouse. We witness animals sniffing one another to see if they are on heat, Whatever the spur, animals get frisky, and they want that release. The release is pleasurable for all animals. Some like to suppress our sexual activities, spouting moral ideologies that run counter to important animal desires.

Explorers visited previously 'uncontacted people' in remote tribes who hadn't made the connection between having sex and pregnancy. They did not know that humping had anything to do with the children that popped out. Most of us have had sex education so it seems absurd to not know this, but I as a child had no idea about the process. I doubt any of us would either unless they had it explained to them. It means that we had sex as a bonding mechanism not as a conscious means to reproduce. Given that a tiny hit rate is sufficient to sustain the world population, it doesn't matter how many sexual acts bring about babies. Rather than thinking that sex is for reproduction, think of sex as a lure to induce people to bond. It is an inducement that happens to bring about the occasional addition.

Consent

Consent maybe limited in many animal species, but humans have laws relating to consent. The laws let a lot down. The laws help stem assaults, but morality plays a bigger part. The alpha male protects, fending off interlopers. They are ever present today as they were eons ago.

Attaining a certain age doesn't automatically give you the ability to provide consent, but it provides a reasonable guide to the level of maturity a person would possess. Casting that aside, how do we deal with those who have an affinity towards the young, rather than an acceptable attraction to those above the age of consent? Any act with a person who is too immature to make an informed choice is abusive. Thus, those that have an affinity towards young people face a life-long issue to contend with. Self-restraint is constantly challenged by this unacceptable pull towards to pleasuring themselves with children.

The nature of someone's affinity can't be altered so can only be contained. A paedophile may find a method of release without any interaction with children. They have a powerful affinity to keep in control. Something drastic needs to be done to break the cycle of being locked up, released then reoffending once more. Doing some time in prison for each crime doesn't solve the problem. Removal of the chemical system that causes the sexual arousal and excitement is an option. Those that cannot control their actions might prefer some form of castration, on a voluntary basis, to free themselves of the temptation and torment.

Not all those that abuse the young are paedophiles as such. They often have a general affinity towards people of all ages and not children specifically. Some abusers are opportunistic. They will groom and exploit children as they are easy available targets.

It hardly needs mentioning that a child who has dreadful sexual interference suffers a huge loss of self-worth and can be haunted by the experience for decades thereafter. Some predators have an utterly misguided idea that they are showing care. Confusing kindness and compassion with delusional destruction. Children can be taught from an early age that a hug and a cuddle is fine, but anything else needs to be reported in confidence to their parents without fear of reprisal. It may appear obvious in retrospect, but when a child seems unusually gloomy about spending time outside of your domain, it may be a subtle clue to there being something wrong going on. Most exploitation of this nature is close to home in the near family rather than by random outsiders.

Tampering with that that is not yours

"Our general has been attacked." "Are they ok?", asks the body double. "Not too bad but they have lost an arm." This nightmare situation is not unique for many of us want things done to their children so that they look the same as them. It is quite bizarre for we never walk down the street each day showing our disfigured genitalia to everyone. You wouldn't dream of shaving a child's head because one of the parents has gone bald.

To claim that it is easier to operate on an innocent's sexual organs when they are babies is a thinly veiled excuse to carry it out when they are powerless to prevent it. A treasured part of the body is amputated by degenerates out of pure odious spite. It is unwarranted. Circumcision is a medical euphemism for a callous procedure that deadens the senses. It makes full sex impossible. It means some have difficulty playing sports. It can cause soreness and lifelong frustration. It may not look like much has been taken. However, that which is stolen would have grown substantially. When laid out it would cover the palm of your hand. It is horrifying given that we claim to treasure children above all other things. If the cultural identity is strong and revered the individual can elect to follow in this path, by their own choosing, when they reach adulthood. Why have a child if you are so vindictive that you are prepared to hold them down and force such violence upon them - just because it happened to you.

Many children die from circumcision. Many are badly wounded. All for zero practical gain. In one case it went so badly wrong that the parents thought it a good idea to raise their son as a girl. The child grew up somewhat confused with their mindset out of sync with their body. He ('she') committed suicide at the age of 23. As you read this, thousands of men have weights hanging from their penises attempting to stretch and regrow what ought to be there.

The foreskin is home to a vast number of nerve endings. It is a most sensitive piece of the human anatomy. Sometimes it gets rather tight to pull it back. This can be fixed without surgery. Pull it back when floppy and induce an erection. It will hurt a lot. Take the pain for as long as you can then relax. Repeat several times a day, for several weeks until all is good.

A real complete penis does need a slightly longer washing routine, but circumcisions don't help that much with cleanliness. As for rates of infection, the difference is highly exaggerated. Statistics are manipulated to deceive. If you frown upon those that have abundant sex, then what better way to curtail it than make sexual activity less enjoyable. The loss of wonderful sensations and the inability to get rewards from certain sexual plays is heart wrenching. Take your tyres of your car and go for a ride, take a

foreskin off a penis and the ride is frustrating too. Why do some want us to live an austere unsatisfying infuriating life?

In any debate about this or similar subjects, bear this in mind; morality tends to follow where the law leads.

Your children are yours to look after, but on no account, do you own them. They own themselves. My child, my choice. Not so. My brother, my choice? My aunt, my choice - to do what we want with them? 'My' is a relationship not possession. It is also their prerogative to decide when and to whom they will lose their virginity. You can advise and provide guidance, but their body is their body. Your child will be born with a different set of preferences to you, and you need only set up the framework for them to explore and discover what is suited to them. Affinities are fixed and locked in place to be identified through exploration with willing participants.

There is no getting away from the duty of care we have for our children. We need to make decisions on their behalf. It is an imperative to make sure they have the right inoculations, of the highest quality and administered in accordance with the latest findings. Neither rushing nor brushing it under the carpet. Knowledge is a wonderful thing, but it can come to us way too late in life. There is a practice called the lotus birth which chastises the haste at which we cut the umbilical cord. If I were again at the side of my partner when she is giving birth, I would be happy requesting that we leave it be for a good while. Not days though as that seems excessive.

Courting

The dating game is played out moving one square at a time. There are very few shortcuts. Chemistry needs time to enact, irrespective of any charming catalysts. Compliments can work wonders as enzymes of new beginnings. Being able to listen well puts some at a great advantage. What about those that lack instant appeal or are non-conforming? No amount of wealth or wisdom encourages people to stop giving them a wide berth. Other tactics need to be deployed to break down the barrier and expose their heart. Attractive people get more attention in most arenas and all of it in places where there is loud music and big crowds. Lots find themselves becoming less fussy as they age. They are not put off by relatively small imperfections as they were in their formative years. We work out what is important and what is less so.

The first square on the love game board is to simply say hello. Then engage and hold a conversation. Moving it forward to a date is one more step, a big step that we need to muster the courage, skill and nerve for. And then we get rejected. Fear of rejection is

very real. From butterfly twinges to extremely raised levels of anxiety that blow opportunities into the wind. People psych themselves up at home. They go out and approach a target. Then back out at the last second. We have this philosophical notion in our mind that there is nothing to lose yet it can get harder and harder for some to overcome the fear. If we face it head on, over and over, we can transform ourselves into an un-embarrassable being. If you stumble your words or say something daft then rather than panic, you make a joke out of it. You continue after a mistake as if it is all totally normal. The finesse: stare into the eyes to show seriousness and mix in a downward all over body stare to flirt. Most people appreciate the conversation even if there is a near zero prospect of a second encounter. Some are alert to the feeling of not wanting to trouble someone. It is a balancing act. Sometimes people are glad that they were worn down by your persistence. If you want to win, you wear rejection as a tried and failed - never mind, rather than let it stew. There are people that **you** do not have the slightest interested in. Acknowledging that allows you to accept that there will be many who are not interested in you either, no matter what.

Some take rejection as an offence. They retaliate. It moves from wanting to get with them to wanting to get back at them. Some spew out an insult and move on. But move on you now must as there is no chance of a second attempt. Some have been rejected by the same person many times but got there in the end. Nastiness would have killed any chance of that. Who dwells on those painful memories of rejection anyway once they find a partner? Rejections are over printed by your success.

A smooth dater approaches a target and talks about the mystery and brilliance of the painter of the painting hanging majestically above. What they do not do, is ask, "where are you from?", "how long have you been here?" or any other question for that matter. Asking questions is needy and dull and tiring. People want to move away quickly from needy, dull, tiring people. Find something to state, say it with enthusiasm and leave the what, why, where, how or who until further into the conversation. Rather than ask "Do you like walking by the river?", state, "Walking by the river is great, fresh air the swirling eddies are nice to watch." Pause, pause, pause, and see if they take the bite and add something to what you are saying. Statements start free flowing conversations whereas questions create awkwardness. If there is competition put, "If you pick me ..." or an equivalent in somewhere.

~~Women~~ people are like cars, as they get older, they depreciate and require more maintenance. Is a younger person more valuable than an older person? A young person might be thought

of as brand new like a car straight out of the factory. The cost of a car is based on quality and performance. Is there some equivalence with people? Some are more attractive, more athletic, fitter, more agile, more capable, more fun, more endearing, more astute, but also more desirable. Desirability depends on who is judging but some will undoubtedly attract far more than others. If we take it to extremes, a person that can't walk, talk, or feed themselves offers a different marriage proposition to a finely honed, intellectually sound, amiable, wonder-lust. There are grades of mate. There are also quite a few compromises, no perfection. Attractiveness has its pros and cons. There is a lot to be said for finding someone that you and only you find attractive.

You meet someone. You like them. You both get on well together. All is good until you get feedback from your friends and family. The feedback is not good. Some will stick it out, but most will dump. They need the approval of others. In many cases subconscious signals from others **sway you before you get past the first mile marker. Society put pressure on us providing dissent or affirmation regarding our dating choice. This impacts our confidence we have in our decision to continue or not.**

No matter how advanced we become as civilizations we have not lost any of our instinctive natural desires. Women will flock towards the alpha-male in their droves, as they have done since our species came into being. This draw is strong and relentless. Some men do not need to be kind and caring for any badness is overlooked or ignored. A morsel of fake charm compensates for awful behaviour. Sometimes women learn after a few bad relationships to opt for decency over brawn. This is when they accept that they were over confident in their ability to fix someone. People have logical, rational reasons for pairing up with someone. He turns heads when he walks in the room. This fact is sufficient. We are animals first and foremost. Hormones, egos, pride, desires, challenges, and bizarre beliefs direct us strongly. Buyer beware. Buying into someone based on their social capital or financial capital may result in a fake and hollow relationship. They may satisfy you in the social scene but behind closed doors there can be emptiness and little love.

Having been rejected by some delightfully attractive, fashionable, popular sorts, you come to your senses and lower your sights. This is when you discover that easier people are nowhere near as easy as you thought. There is untold demand for weak, vulnerable, semi-attractive, valent characters. You have looked beyond the acne, the dumpiness, the broken front tooth, the quirks that are not endearing and still get turned down.

Skins and tissue wrapped around skeletons are drawn to other skins with tissue wrapped around skeletons. Once in close contact the dialogue begins. Here we both learn of what inspires and interests one another. How closely aligned do we think we need to be? We can educate them. We can involve them. We can share experiences. Five people with the same physical qualities can be differentiated, not by their interests but by how much genuine interest they have in what interests you. Are they taking on board what you are saying? Do they care to partake to some degree in your activities? Do they care most about themselves?

Some nations have compiled a file on every citizen in the land. Everything about your behaviour gets written down. Your punctuality, reliability, penchants, tastes, habits, and so forth. By and large, people don't change much. This information is used against you. In the dating game we have many beginner-psychologists that will scrutinize your behaviour too. They have a list of things to look out for. Do you seem insecure, politically hard-headed, controlling and so on? You will be seen as a piece of useless garbage, fit for no one, if you fall foul of these readings. Thus, to help you avoid being thrown on the waste heap, get acquainted with these lists.

A partner is on the same side as you. Co-operative and only competitive to get the best out of you. No one would be violent, abusive, or threatening if they are on the same side as you.

Is there 'the one' – out there somewhere? The short answer is yes indeed. They will share bunches of fixed preferences with you. Both of you are 'touchy feely'. If that applies. Same passions with each contributing something to your most pleasurable pursuits. Enthralling conversations will continue far beyond the honeymoon period. There is more to your conversations than simply the ones we have getting to know each another. All else will find a resolution. However, on balance of probabilities there will be something that halts proceedings. The one for you may already be in a relationship. Or one of you fails to see what is right in front of them. Or a barrier presents itself that is difficult to overcome. Race, religion, age, class, status, and that powerful expectation of the type of person others prefer you to marry.

Before you take the first step in the tumultuous dating journey, get yourself dating ready. Begin with your teeth.

Laura

Life rolls along, all fine, no real problems, things are rather good in fact. Yes, there can be the occasional wish for more but there is nothing unusual about that. Then something is building, and I am suddenly hit by this tumultuous sense of panic. I realise I should act. Before it is too late. A grenade has been set off.

Laura's presence has an affect that effects deep through the physical into my soul. A sincere desire. I see before me a rose pearl, a soft but resilient jewel that I want to hug and squeeze for eternity. It is mayhem for my self-control. Everything is turned upside down. Philosophical propositions are being re-examined. Aside from that, these emotions are real and meaningful. So much so that I can barely function. The feelings are relentless and persistent. Laura is an opportunity like no other. Despite trying to come to my senses, the facts are clear. This particular person can make me feel more alive than ever before. I have been infatuated with plenty of people before, but this is so much more powerful. I stop, I recheck. I keep asking myself why is Laura so different? Thinking about Laura leads to a stride forward in the inner beauty vs justifying shallow attraction to attractive people problem. This has been bugging for a while.

It didn't take me long to notice Laura, she has a perfect frame, nice height and an attractive face that is not too ostentatious. This draws me towards her. Laura can handle herself, that is for sure. Anyone trying standard needy questions gets little more than yes/no answers. She doesn't make it easy. One feels like being down a coal mine with no headlamp and a toothpick trying to find a vein of soft rock. I have plenty of resolve. If one thing doesn't cut it, I'll try something else until she begins to talk in undulating tones of bliss. Educated, astute mixed with less serious exchanges. Pure delight. During a quiet spot watching the dancers I laughed a little at what seems like two invalids trying to escape the wrath of a plastic bag. She chortles, "what are you laughing at?" and then we talk in tune.

Each weekly dalliance with her helps me build a picture. Laura is a masterpiece of engineering, with a finely honed personality and an internal beauty of sublime proportions. She certainly has eaten well and made the effort to exercise. This requires conscientiousness, restraint, determination, moderation and much more. All of which comes from within. She interlaces my personal preferences with an uncanny unbelievability. Here is someone I can dance with, talk with on many levels, do and do with, not just sit down, and leave the action to others. It doesn't end there. Not at all. A tear was shed inside me when Laura meekly told me about the application she made for a job at a premier school. She didn't think she would get it but get it she did. Positive pessimism with panache.

Five seconds, one small incident and I find out something special. An arrogant opportunist chancer walks in just as she was heading out and dived on her for a kiss. Laura handled this with aplomb. Arm up immediately in defence and head ducking out of the way. He still got her. I have showed restraint in many ways and believe

me this is hard. Some however spot those that are isolated and take advantage. On the surface it is sympathy, empathy, and care but they are pests. These rule breakers do make headway and frustrate the rest. I dearly hope I am not a hypocrite.

I like physical contact. A lot. Dancing provides that. Grappling with an other. It is not a sexual thing, but there is the dance orgasm - feeling it. It washes in when you least expect it with people that you least expect. Aside from that, having Laura in my arms is something to appreciate. It is a privilege that I need to remind myself of regularly and not take blithely. Laura offers the chance to fulfil a longstanding longing, namely, to develop our own moves. I sketched out a move that goes into reverse midway allowing her to lead it symmetrically back to the start. We would swap lead and follow. We may even end up vying for the lead. High hopes. Nevertheless, it isn't just on the dance floor that I want us to be in competition and cooperation. I want a relationship of equals. People are more equal than others and some think they can dance to the music, they can't. People think they have learnt enough to be considered a dancer, they haven't. They barely consider flourishes, smooches, style and as for syncopating, no.

Certain actions are reserved for certain people. Laura, Laura, Laura my thumbs would encode via gentle taps on her knuckles and soft ply above. Week after week for months on end. No reaction. Nothing. Maybe she was truly focused on the teacher and what to do in this dance lesson. Or like a bluffer in a poker game was keeping a blank face.

Another reserved item was a simple jig, linking arm in arm, turning around a few times. This is not a move usually found in Jive but something I have done a few times here and many times elsewhere. Laura however was markedly different. Uniquely so. I initiated it, but she upped the pace to a ridiculous level, spinning insanely with a joyous glee on her face. Maybe she has a mischievous streak or maybe she liked to spin to crazy excess. Dangerous but trust must have been there.

Smile girl smile. Not for me. If I smile at her, I get nothing back. If I tell her to smile there is reluctance. One week I declared that I am not moving until she smiled. What I got was a comical gurning grin which made me laugh. I won't ask again.

Most followers will look at you. Not Laura. She would have her head at a quarter turn right and a quarter down, until a brief look at me before commencing the move in hand. Maybe a staring competition will alter things? Although she 'passed the test' on this, this will be another thing to cast aside.

Frustration and the feeling of being virtually invisible pervades the hall each week. I want this to change. I need to find a way of getting on Laura's radar. Ultimately, I want to throw all the fishing gear aside, but beforehand I need to use it to see if I can get her to show that I count. So, I am going to use the power of curiosity, consciously. I will tell her about a small revelation that I had recently but not explain it fully. She is likely to pass along the line to me twice tonight. I will use the first micro-dance together to load the bait, drop the hook and see. The result was remarkable. She instantly came at me the second time around wanting to know more about this little revelation. Success. Joy. Something to cherish. Now I was set to 'ask the question'. I had a card, a romance day card written with some ambiguity that could be passed off if needed as something akin to a birthday card. What I needed to do now was to present it and wait for the response.

The shoelace trick wasn't planned but played out well. It just so happened that I was surrounded by five women and had managed to get one of them to tie my laces up for me. This is useful in belief bias. As I looked up Laura was laughing a little at this. A lonely soul is rarely as appealing as one that seems to be getting plenty of attention. We really do care what others think. If others think highly of you, your muse will too. Remember though, tricks can backfire. Badly.

It is quite a thing having absolute total confidence in approaching people, any person, no matter how voluptuous then becoming unfeasibly nervous when in dating mode. Anyway, I gave the card to her on the second pass. The next segment started and one by one the followers peeled off. Now I am going to get an answer. What I ended up with was confusion and uncertainty. She gave me two signals. I need three. Thumbs. She used her thumbs on my hand, as I had previously to her - but more wholeheartedly. However, it could mean, thanks, thanks but no thanks, or anything. Was it subconscious or delivered with meaning? At least it was clear that there was no awkwardness. Far from it.

Now things take an ugly turn. She left quite quickly, and I did not chase after her. Three signals and I would have. It has gone from hopeless to hope back to dismal hopelessness. She is no longer turning up. No more dalliance, no more opportunity to ask her out on a date. Nothing, all gone. Curiosity plays havoc with your head. Is she ill? Is she caught up in the flooding? Is she avoiding me? – that would be awful. Really bad as I would despise myself if she no longer wanted to come dancing there. I recount what had happened. She was in excellent spirits. However, I know there is a major problem. It is what is commonly referred to as the age gap problem. Not an issue for me of course, or so I believe. That is not the only problem. I know that.

Dwelling on the vaguely possible ups, but most likely the potential disconsolate feelings that are to come for one week is hard, three is giving me an insight into what it is like for less fortunate souls on this planet. Innocent prisoners locked up, those searching for loved ones that have gone missing, those in bereavement with no closure and so on. I can cling on to the fact that she has not actually said 'no thanks' yet. I had made a move, not making one would be really depressing. If I had left it too late, I would be mired in self-pity forever.

I look out of the window of this wonderful building I own. The fields, the trees, the gardens, cars, and machinery. The solid static stuff. Tonnes of stuff, much of it valuable. What I crave is an interactive creature that is small on the scale of what sits around me. To highlight the absurdity of life, all I need to do is move some neurons in Laura's head. I need to occupy enough space, shift enough links to do what it says in the chapter choice, make one side outweigh the other in my favour. To have any chance of that I need to set my stall out with someone that is not even contactable. I say life is a series of problems. Can I track her down in a manner that avoids making me seem like a stalker? Can I finally persuade her to take the first induction? I can be persuasive for sure, but this is a very hard sell. This is not a challenge for the sake of a challenge, the upsides are genuine. What I feel I can offer are significant. I would resolve by practical means to ensure that all pledges are followed through.

Innocuous tales of woe like this are playing out around the world all the time. There are dalliances galore. At some point defeat is accepted and we say adios, goodbye and good luck. We say it with sour grapes. We want the best for them really, but bitterness pervades. In my case, how much of a challenge will it be for you to secure a partner that will foster an environment for you to bloom, Laura? Maybe I should donate some thick gloves as it is not going to be like finding a needle in a haystack, but a needle in a thicket of stinging nettles, thorns, and slime. She will merge her life with someone, and will wake up with this bedfellow shortly after the honeymoon period ends and say to herself "is this it?"

Look, from someone who wrote the chapter fair, it is simple; I fancy Laura and Laura doesn't fancy me. I am not bitter or spiteful. I want the reward that she won't give me. I want to be co-considerationally selfish with Laura. I want to give her lots, for my enjoyment too.

I have a bankable reverence detector; I am sure many of you do too. Not long before this debacle I noted the way someone spoke about their husband. It was in fact the only time I recall him even being mentioned. Clearly, he was not held high in their esteem. Six months later they split up. Laura mentioned her father a

couple of times. Here though there was noticeable reverence. Maybe I could make a wild stab in the dark and suggest that she is a 'daddy's girl'. That is nice to see for sure. Disapproval springs to mind, disapproval from someone that she would want approval from irrespective of her adulthood. The consternation and concern reserved for a number, an age difference, is so stark compared to a height difference that stands out, or any number of destructive features of a person.

In a delusional state we fabricate a reason to be believed. I state with confidence that I differ from the others that have tried it on with Laura. I declare that I will embrace her. Embrace who she is. To put it simply I don't want to change her in any way. People may make similar declarations but end up being possessive, controlling and sometimes abusive. Laura will not be diminished by me. I know she has managed just fine so far. In Laura's case you could say there is a want rather than a need for someone. Laura is not single because there is something wrong with her. Not at all. There is nothing amiss with Laura. Having said that I was gobsmacked by something she did say. Twice. In the spirit of privacy, I need not go into detail. Nevertheless, the dates are the problem. It goes beyond being able to deal with her, to handle someone like her. You may think it is a matter of learning the craft and having the craftiness to succeed, but it is the respect that is hard to muster.

So, what did I learn? They say you have to love yourself first. Thus, this confirms the idea of looking after yourself is vital, it comes from our inner beauty. It is what attracts us to one another. The fantasy was enjoyable, while it lasted, despite the agony. Waking up crying at four in the morning is not going to happen again any time soon. Laura is special to me. Her ordinariness a plus. That coupling of astuteness, capable, competency with abundant femininity is not found in many potential suitors. I even began to believe in fate for a bit. We do see what we want to see and if we get carried away with it, it is punishing. The nothing matters chapter became extremely poignant. For a month or two I cared for nothing aside from my own circumstance. What did I gain from seeing Laura as a rarity? Despair. In every relationship there are compromises and compromise I must. I will have to trade things that I want for things that are superfluous. Someone may offer to be a housewife when I want a teacher, a teacher with a section of life that is hers. I don't want Laura to wash my clothes, feed me or do any domestic duties. I will trade those for doing a multitude of fun things.

Thinking about your relationship, do you have real interest in each other's passions? You certainly don't need to have the same level of enthusiasm as them. However, are you scoffing, rolling

your eyes or worst of all interrupting them to get them off their favourite subject. I have seen some people completely fail to see why their partner is so obsessed with something yet secretly save up and pay for a trip abroad to visit a holy grail together. How different. Have you simply found someone that likes you too? Or makes it seems so and that is enough? Are they yours now - therefore doing what is sufficient to keep the pretence of love rolling on? Are you too entrenched? Is it pragmatism?

One thing I know for sure is that a partner has to want you about in the same way people around a table will shuffle up or even rearrange the furniture, willingly if they want you there. If they don't, the table radiates a cold blow of unwelcome wind. I need to entice Laura, never pushing or pulling. I will also need to be wooing Laura forever - a marriage is a stage not an end goal.

From the outset I was already sure beyond any measure that the idea of me and Laura getting together was plainly absurd. Even in the soberest sensible state it doesn't help having faith that we could in theory have it all. I would insist that her career continues with me doing the day care for any child that enters the scene. I have no illusions, nothing I can offer makes any difference. The irony too, that were I a good deal younger I would not have had the tenacity nor the temerity to ask her out.

The memory of her intense dazzling aura will linger. If only. She is one of the few select individuals that I forgot to make a bit of fun of. She has turned me down for dinner and dance, twice. She has a piano that she never uses; thus, "I know why you don't play that piano, because the only thing you are good at playing, is playing hard to get". It would be a while before I had the chance to make that jibe. Events precluded that. One highlight of Laura's being is those facial expressions. She nodded and gushed enthusiastically at the mention of how good a certain restaurant was. Her face rapidly shifted to shock then disgust when I suggested we go there. I laughed inside about her display of shock then horror. She let me down gently. It was a marvellous ruse that I pretended to accept. Same result half hour later when I asked her if I could join her on a hill climb. We parted. I didn't tell Laura that I loved her.

Little things

Little things mean the world to some. Not doing those same little things can inflict a lot of hurt. The whole impression we have of someone, in fact the whole impression we have of a creed of people can be changed by one little thing. One tiny bit of help can revise your opinion of people and change the way we regard them. One tiny bit of difference in the way someone treats you compared to others magnifies your resentment. We give people a dirty look, we make an off-hand comment, we coerce, we make someone feel awkward. That bit of spitefulness, that showing our

disapproval, that reaction to what we see, can have a hugely detrimental impact on some people. And we have no clue about the consequences. The cumulative affect of you and others doing it too, destroys.

This story revolves around little things. It is not far removed from what goes on tirelessly in an infant's school playground. We would think we would grow up, but we don't. Not really.

There were little things that Laura would not do. Not looking at me. Certainly not smiling at me or coming over to me. They ushered in the staring competition, the refusal to move until she smiled and the curiosity ploy. She more than made up for this though, by being marvellous company and obliging with a new dance move I wanted to try out. She had these most wonderful facial expressions. Endearing facial expressions that sometimes matched what she was saying through her mouth.

Truth can be a poison or medication. I had fumbled with something that had therapeutic value but became noxious. She scolded me in a most demeaning manner. I have nothing she needs, nothing she wants and cannot fulfil anything she craves. Only a fool would go beyond the first rejection. Only a sadist would enjoy this sort of pain. Only a narcissist would have this level of faith in themselves. I extended the torture for far longer than necessary. Or to be fair, it was necessary to get the golden nuggets that I began to write about.

I did not plan any of this. There was no ulterior motive. Nothing was premeditated. I did not go out and select a target to aim at. I can recall the moment I thought of adding Laura to this text but have no clue what really spurred it. Life passes us by in a blur. Time slipped by quickly when I stumbled on this to focus on.

"Never tell a potential partner how beautiful they are." It boosts their ego and lowers your comparative value. You leave that until a good way into the courting ritual. I had written something using every superlative except the word beautiful and presented it to the one person outside of family that I treasure the most.

Inner beauty

Hair makes such a difference to how we look. As does makeup. We can use extra foundation. We can shave hairy armpits or not. We can push metal through imaginable and unimaginable sites. Our attire can be dowdy or decadent. Jewellery makes a statement. The list goes on. For the purposes of this argument, these things are in our control. What we display on the outside come from ideas inside us. Our appearance is reflected in the choices we make within ourselves. We change, we adjust, we alter our look based on internal decisions.

Exercise, weightlifting, dieting, all have an impact on our physique. Muscle building, staying in trim, keeping fit and looking good, takes effort. It may also take will and determination to get ourselves to where we want physically. We must muster what is needed to stick to a regime. We have to find the resolve to make the bodily changes that we want. That resolve and determination comes from inside us. The wish to change our outer appearance leads to a change in body shape. The decision to do something about our physicality comes from within. So too is any decision to have surgery to remodel what we have. This again is based on how we feel about ourselves.

Beauty is in the eye of the beholder, but exterior beauty is nonetheless connected to the inner self, the inner beauty. Those that are happy with their weight, happy with their appearance demonstrate another form of beauty; being at one with themselves. Inner beauty is often thought of as our character and personality, maybe mannerisms, compassion shown, empathy, ideals, moral code, and such like. This is still true. It is a blend of these but also items that affect our outward facade. We think. We decide. We act and our look changes. Why say all of this, what am I getting at? Can we have some justification to being drawn towards someone based on how they present themselves? Yes, we can. Attraction is so much more than this of course. Nevertheless, our beauty is a fusion of that raw hereditary design and the rash inner splendour.

The inner/outer beauty is a two-way street. How people respond to how we look affects us inside, potentially chiding us to change. Any accident, any incident, any illness, or recovery that has a physical consequence, changes our outlook on life. We begin to think differently, and our inner self is modified. Even a minor scar tells a story about the person inside. Your personality is moulded by your body. Trying to be full of life is made much more difficult with an ailing, failing body.

Did Laura have boundless inner beauty? In the sense that it gave her a look that appealed to me, too right, absolutely. I liked her style, her ways, her jolliness, and lots more besides. Things that stemmed from within her. Classy, not haughty, a person of substance; prim. She made little attempt to obscure discrimination that a commoner would never be guilty of.

Would a reappraisal of her inner beauty in a more rounded fashion act as a form of rebuttal? The nonchalant self-serving attitude is embedded within. Thus, plenty of ammunition is available to attack Laura's character. She may even turn out to be a fairly empty shell. Is the enthusiasm for staying in shape nothing more than vanity? No, it makes her desirable. Would someone soon become bored by her? Is it just a mysterious intriguing front

for plain, plain, plain? I still have enthusiasm to see what I can draw out and what I could do with her. Alongside. Together.

Racists think they are better than people of a different colour. Sexists think they are more capable. Attractive people think they are more worthy. They share one thing in common, they all discriminate. I and most people are prone to feeling superior in at least some regards. Racism, sexism, and other forms of discrimination use the same mechanism. We judge then treat accordingly. Ignoring someone because of their shade of skin is no different to ignoring someone because of their attractiveness. All forms of discrimination are equally rotten.

How do we grade people? By their status? By their level of fame? We could of course pay close attention to charm, charisma, and friendliness. As someone walks by, we gauge their attractiveness, maybe scoring them a number out of ten. We might value someone's expertise and care nothing for how they look. For they are there to do something for us. If you are in need, you need not look presentable, you can be dirty and unkempt. Who cares how scruffy a mechanic is, if they can get your mechanical thing up and running again? The circle of contempt runs along a chain finding ever more irrational reasons to look down on the next in line. Even the lowest of the low will take pride not so much in small accomplishments but sticking to couth principles. We are all valid, equal, so say I but of course some of us do indeed shine in certain areas. We are adamant, consciously, or not, that people, certain people are to be kept at a distance. Oh, how discriminatory some have been until they got to know people of a different creed or colour.

Our dear name

My name, your name and the correct pronunciation can be important to people. "lin" not "line"; Carolin / Caroline. Some have an easier time than others remembering names. Whatever the case, nothing beats the ability to get someone's attention and respect than hollowing out their name or using it regularly during a conversation. We are all human and make mistakes. Hence some latitude can be given to those that get it wrong once or twice, but people expect some effort to sort out the preferred pronunciation as soon as possible. Over the years I have made ever greater effort to find ways of recalling names and it pays off.

I called Laura Lauren for many weeks. She never said a thing until I said to Jill, "this is my mate Lauren", upon which Laura lifted her head skywards and set me right, "my name is actually Laura". She never spoke my name, not once, yet seemed to know everyone else's. What does that say? We can read too much into it, but it can be significant. Was Laura disregarding me? A little. She was what one might call, being diplomatic with me. As said elsewhere

I do the same, have done the same, will do the same to others too.

The pain, the pain is real. She has on so many occasions, tormented me. Thirst quenching crimson cream hastily accompanied by the most bitter aftertaste that induces yet more tears. I would not be surprised if some spirit in the heavens thought it would be entertaining to send someone in my direction that could goad me. They selected an optimal device that would grab my attention. Dangling a carrot that hovers close yet forever out of reach. In truth, this is nothing more than an experiment that has parallels with the animal machine one. A look at emotions rather than at the way the mind acts when changing tasks. I can divorce the pain from real hurt. Pain as an experience rather than true displeasure. If you need to pee you go to the loo. If you are hungry you eat. Here you simply allow the tears to flow. It is not really me that is collaborating with fishing paraphernalia. Laura's lure has one heck of a nasty hook, with a tasty bit of meat on it, that ends up puncturing a savage hole through your gums and exits through your cheek. Getting it out entails dealing with that one-way barb. More excruciating agonizing suffering. Thank goodness for philosophy and its practical help that it can provide. One can never win by holding grudges. Forgiveness no, but there is always scope for redemption.

In spare moments I consider the following: I wish I had never met her. Knowing that she exists is a problem. I look around for someone else. None of them are as desirable for so many reasons. This has been going on for far too long. I would be advised to let it go and move on. Love would be highly one sided. Even in years to come. That is never good. The story still needs completing. It needs a more gratifying transition.

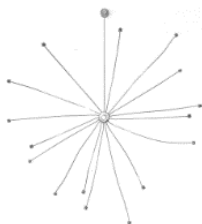
Belief

I shall locate Laura; it should be quite easy. Except it wasn't. What I uncover was not just a girl that I had become absorbed by, but a flaw in the way humans think. I had mentioned to Laura the problems some get by the time they reach their thirties from overdoing it. She shrugged her shoulders and indicated that she was already about that age. I took a close look. I could now see that she could well be a lot older than my first casual appraisal suggested. Not twenty-five or so. I hadn't paid any attention to her age before. However, I put this number at the heart of the search for Laura.

I only have tiny bits of information. A surname would help as does knowing someone's approximate age. An index of people showed two people called Laura. One is a little shy of thirty, twenty-eight the other was far too old. I am convinced this younger one is the one I am looking for. I believe this firmly. The shoulder shrug must

have meant she was close to thirty. I find nothing much on this twenty-eight-year-old, but I find plenty of things about the older one. There must be a picture somewhere that could prove this older one was not her. The address is within the vicinity I expect, but the occupier is too old. Maybe the data on the index had not been updated and it refers to the person who lived in the house prior. That would be fine except that it would be a stretch for her to afford such a place having not long left university. I found something a Laura had scribed as a sub ten-year-old. This confirmed that it was a different Laura. I realise later that I should have read it properly, not just skim read it. From a causal look it ended up being an elongated case that would stump a cold case detective. I got past the point of caring about seeing Laura again. It was turning into nothing other than a puzzle to be solved. Deep curiosity. Piecing clues together and having faith that I will succeed eventually.

It is hard to let go of a belief, even when presented with good indications that it might be wrong. There will be lots of links that connect to that belief. The links are valid. They are comprised of correct information. It is what they are connected to that is wrong. I seriously considered an unlikely coincidence; there were two Laura's with the same surname that went to dances in the area. The truth hit hard. The age is not a big thing as such, but it alters a lot. It is a shock. How could I have been so wrong? There is a realm in which age will matter. Pass a point and the fire in that desire is unavoidably converted into a singed charred edifice of regret. This is not my fault but undershooting on the age estimation makes me inadvertently clumsy in my behaviour.



It can take us a long time to reconcile disturbances to our central beliefs. I have framed the entire thing around someone's age. That is the central node. It underpins everything else. Take that pivotal node away and it is profoundly unsettling. We build a large sandcastle upon a single piece of information. When that fundamental piece of information is shown to be wrong

the whole thing comes crashing down, but the remnants of the castle is still there. We may prefer to keep it all in place by substituting the wrong core belief with another belief instead, an absurd belief. That way we don't have to rearrange thousands of links in our mind. I had to go see her to truly believe it. We need to see things first-hand. We need to go to the scene of the crime. We need a visit to the devastated area to comprehend the effects of an earthquake or volcano. I got to see her without any makeup. Now I was able to re-gauge the number of years she has spent on earth and allow it to sink in. Despite that it will be a long time

before it truly registers. I can still find myself thinking of her as a younger person.

As the mist descends enveloping my field, I turn my gaze upon myself. The misty scene has an eerie tone, adorable, delightful, and quiescent. It is far from a daily occurrence around here. Misty scenes redrew the environment creating a memorable haven for the young Laura, at ease and insulated from the world beyond. Does the infrequency of the mist correlate with the infrequency of looking at things from Laura's point of view? I have hit a small white ball into dense fog. Walked some distance for it to reveal itself. It would never have been seen again if it were hooked or sliced. I gave her chocolates despite having the resource indicating she loved flowers. I have said myself, do unto others the way they want to be done to. Here I failed to do a little thing well. When do I stop foraging in the undergrowth to clasp that white pearl in this game of life?

I ponder what time spent with Laura would be like. Would it pan out as I imagine? What about the long game? Some have managed to foster a relationship years after an initial encounter. These are rare cases. Hoping for success in the more distant future has ramifications. It hinders finding someone else. The struggle is real. So much investment with no payoff. Jaded. Disillusionment. The devils of dating. Only prep for the next encounter if we can keep the faith. And faith we must keep for it will come if one keeps trying. Excuses are made when we fail to get a partner. The one-handed shuffle releases the tension. You may even have a go at taking things close to climax, holding off then repeat. Whatever the case, those that push through, endure, refusing to capitulate, have a much more enriched life. With someone.

Have you ever noticed a phenomenon whereby hustlers fall lucky? Serendipity, chance, fortuitousness, one thing leads on to another thing, a more profitable thing. The hustler was in pursuit of something then stumbled on something else that was unexpected, unplanned. Had they not been active in one area that something else would not have fell into their lap. A trader importing goods circumventing laws and custom duties was introduced to drug trafficking. Given his reputation he was chosen to work with the drug growers. Luck favours the brave I suppose. Whilst this phenomenon is witnessed frequently by tricksters, criminals, and evil doers it occurred in this harrying of Laura.

Laura reinvigorated my zest to dance. She gave me the impetus to address the equality issue in dancing, namely men predominantly leading women. The more I pushed this course the more I discovered. At first, I thought it was just sexist towards

women. However, men are at a huge disadvantage in the early stages of learning to dance. They need to learn a lot of moves before they can ask someone to dance. The women can be led a full song on their first night. Men will need ten to twenty lessons. With lead sharing the men can lead what they know then let a proficient woman lead the rest. The women can learn the lead a little at a time. They can do it gradually at their own pace, adding more moves each session.

Dance is expanded greatly when we embrace both the lead and follow role. As for snatching, stealing the lead, words can't convey the potential fun that can be. On the odd occasion when a dance was a little flat, I would hand the lead over early and let them make something better of it. It expands dancing for all. I created Laura's move. It is a move that hands over the lead from me to her. This was the start of the journey. This move is the only thing one needs as a dancer to start lead sharing. It can have an aspirational quality - seduction and smoothness shy of raunchy.

I have always consciously made an effort to dance with all. Young and old. Some dancers do tune into some better than others. This can be their explanation for why they dance together more frequently. With Laura I pretended that it was just her dancing potential that gave me licence to select her to collaborate with. Whilst it did lead to the thought of lead sharing, I have not had the inclination to make a move up for anyone else. I reformed and formulated Megan's move.

I am always on the backfoot. Messing up each attempt to fix the last thing I messed up. In another life I will try and not repeat these mistakes. I have a habit of giving thanks by means of small gifts to those that show me consideration. I know that one can never buy friendships. I prefer giving when it is least expected and always well after the event. Laura gave me back a hat before, now was just as keen to return something that had a good bit more monetary value. Oh, those strained exchanges. An underlying desire to avoid being outright rude but indicative of wanting thee to go. She dropped a cutting micro revelation. I have been excluded. I am accustomed to these strikes. I am not wishing to become numb to the pain but see it as an experience for me to take in, observe and see what happens in my body. Any sadness is fleeting and controllable. The wish to return the thank you gift signalled that that she wanted to wash her hands of me.

Laura will wane. We are the fruit from the flower from the tree. Everyone's surface appeal ebbs away. We sure see the slow-motion shift. Softening steadily then wrinkling. Ever more so week by week, year by year. Some iron out wrinkles in the mind and others become more obtuse. Laura doesn't seem to be

waning quite yet. Quite the opposite as each time I gaze in her direction I am more fond of what I see.

Catalogue dating

Hasty appraisals of images are made. Sometimes too hasty. Presentation counts somewhat. Systems that ask you to toss out an attention grabber are more productive for me. "I know why you are single", was not left unnoticed by someone that cares about nothing more than their perfect pretend phoney image. Her prose was littered with superficial 'meaningful' pearls of wisdom. She told me to seek respect not attention whilst having a photograph taken from above showing her cleavage and legs aligned into view. It is a multi-stage process. It is chemistry. Boiling off to leave a concentrate. Relegate, relegate and more relegating fine people based on arbitrary off-putting glimpses. Then more whittling down by the capriciousness of the suitors.

We each have a hit rate. This can be adjusted by dexterity and nerve. It is often counter intuitive. Doubting their story is not in the courting advice books. "43 candles on that cake but profile states you are 41? Nice pictures by the way". Boom. Connection and a reason for the disparity is given. We like to maintain our image and don't like to be thought of as dishonest. We can overestimate the advantage wealth gives people. Lust trumps all. In an ideal world I would have one partner for lust and another for satisfying adventure. We are drawn to bodies and the words coming from the best bodies have the most gravitas in the social dating scene.

The first face to face meeting might bring about disappointment or a pleasant surprise. The person now in front of us is often far different to what we were expecting. Not only do we look different to the pictures, but pictures convey an impression of the sort of person we are. This can be unreliable. We are inclined to make assumptions. Knowing this we can change our game plan. I began to target those that I would have brushed aside before. This targeting could be done without compromising on key factors.

Interact, talk, listen, play, game and connect to build a better chance of agreeing to that request for a night out. Much less success is found when you emulate a cold calling salesman knocking at the door. Create familiarity first. Dating is dating, not friendship making. Your aim is to secure a partner, not be someone that helps them get a partner that is not you. Thus, it can pay to steer conversations away from mental or emotional issues that have kept someone single.

Select a target. Select multiple targets preferably. The aim is to become a familiar figure. Once you have spoken with them a good

few times, ask them out. Get rejected. Backtrack. Get them to do things for you. Ask them out again. Be mindful of the properties of harassment. So long as it is kept most amicable it will be fine. Take the hint, take it on the chin. You have plenty of targets running in parallel. One will relent in time.

Dating can just happen for some. For others it is a long learning process. All that refining. Getting better at it. It can be a tough slog to improve a skill that is utilised no more once we pair up. We could carry on with what we learnt in the coupling game; we can continue to win over the one we have. The best daters can find themselves being the ones that struggle with the longevity of their relationships. I have encountered many of these not so happy people. There are compromises that we are forewarned about and yet more compromises that come to light as we bury ourselves in our newfound love. Love can take over. Quickly. How many are infused so greatly that they don't bother to evaluate the downsides. How many bide their time? Tick tock the clock takes its toll. That is the ignorance paradox once again, would it have been better to wait. Would it have been better to catch the zeitgeist and plump for someone earlier? We can only speculate. Imagine.

There are very few counter plays to the problem of being blanked and forever more ignored. No answer, no contact, no interaction just silence. We can bombard them, bang on their door, or try anything we can. All it does it strengthen the barrier of entry. Any last gasp message needs proper consideration and careful wording. A relationship whether romantic, business or friendship can be hard to recover once a mind has reconfigured the importance of it. Do people feel guilty and bad about stopping all communication? Not really, not that much. They stop thinking about you quite quickly. It is a relief not having to call or compose more messages. A burden lifted.

The only slither of hope lies in being able to identify what they might still need. Most calculate that they can manage fine without you. So, it must be something quite important to them - that only you can offer. It hurts, it confuses us. It is the god forsaken curiosity that won't let us rest and accept it. So many questions unanswered. So many things you want to say. So many ideas that could make it magically work. People talk to the dead. It is half as good as talking to them when they were alive. You can talk to the estranged too. Not that they will hear you. In your mind the two of you were the perfect couple. The destiny gods think otherwise. They are cruel. Not cruel to be kind, just cruel. We as humans get hurt. We then get messed up a little. Then we transfer that hurt to the next in line. The spiral of spitefulness. Why, you

ask yourself, did I bother to be nice, kind, decent, understanding, empathetic and a good sort? It got me nowhere.

Sometimes being told honestly why someone no longer wants to take it any further can help in your dating adventure. Most reasons are nothing but patronising. I was fortunate on one occasion to be told that I seemed 'indifferent'. With Laura still on my mind that was probably correct. Laura is an ideal notion. One that is hard to match. I preferred that to some standardised generic, "We didn't seem to connect. I am sure you will find someone nice soon".

After a separation people call in to collect things they need and for that reason only. Making it easier, being convivial doesn't budge them nor will making things difficult. It is over. The only control we have is the speed at which we decide to adjust things in our own mind.

Rebuilding rapport

I dance with Laura again. How can one describe a face where you pull your cheeks in, clench and relent? I have managed to persuade her to dance with me with the help of a brazen high-pressure sales trick. Ask, then look at them directly. Wait, say nothing, hold your nerve, don't give them an opt out. One has to turn the thumb screws down hard on occasion. I asked first then a few minutes later got her up. I only need agreement, once the agreement has been forthcoming there is no need to rush. Much of life runs better when we make clear arrangements. A night out with lots of people runs smoother if everyone knows from the outset to be at certain places at certain times. Ask, ask and asking first, avoids a lot of trouble. Ask before we touch someone. Ask before we do something to someone.

The surest way to bring anyone onside is good engagement, avoiding anything remotely argumentative. Arguing in dating loses, always. If a relationship is faltering, we are tempted to argue our case. We can win them over by appearing to be in the wrong. Later on, we can gradually tease them towards our way of thinking.

Loiterers - people we don't want around us, people that won't go away. Usually if we ignore them, they will get the hint. We don't want to leave our seat so what can we do to put an end to their advances? We can say something that skirts the truth. Something credible that lets them down gently. We find a way to keep their pride intact. However, when we do this with someone that remains on the scene, we might want to be careful about any slip up a short while later. It is hard work. Silly excuses wear thin when it becomes apparent that people are never being straight with us.

Work hard, put in the effort, do things right and all will be great. Aspirations, expectations, dreams, and the reality. It can pan out so differently to what we imagined in our youth. Nothing will get in the way. We spot signs of things getting better. These new-fangled things called computers were supposed to help. Instead, they made us reliant upon them. Better sure but with a cost. We have been faithful ourselves and had conviction that our partner would be the same. People that we don't want to leave will leave and leave they will on account of being forever misdirected. How dare they leave. Well, dare they did. We pay no heed to the ones we discard. These can be the ones we never realise, never understand were not the ones to push away. Ignorance paradox.

It can be frustrating living a life solo, but do we ask why someone would want to be with us? Our existence is enough, is it not? If you don't like it, look elsewhere. I have encountered plenty that are lost and looking for answers. They are keen to offer up theories that usually point the blame at many things apart from them themselves. They do not like being challenged; many will not abide it. It can be bad enough listening to unrequested advice from friends and family. Being challenged by a lowly outsider is an attack, an attack on all we have built.

I may be struggling to shift those neurons in this other, but in my own mind I begin to desist from side-lining the main truth. Preferences. Preferences can't be budged. If preferences are akin to a stack of plates, the stack is very tall, and I am decidedly close to the bottom of the pile. I know, a life as a singleton is better than being bound up with anything bordering on a repugnant repulsive revolting loathsome annoyance. So, with this clear, why continue? It will not lead anywhere for whilst memories can be formed and moved about, we can't alter someone's genome. Our preferences are in our genome. My genes are attracted to Laura and repelled in equal measure by her genes.

Gold digging is a pursuit of the persistent. Luck will come. A modest piece was unearthed after some considerable amount of detecting by someone who had spent years looking. It was shaped like a handsome Buddha giving it greater value and cachet. What did this fossicker do next? They went back the next day to see what else could be got. What did they find? Nothing other than a huge crater. Their friend had similar ideas and spent the night digging a huge hole. What they found we will never know. I have gotten many golden items from Laura and want to grab more before anyone puts a huge crater in her. In the meantime, I dote on a flower who has all the happiness petals in place. A good job. Priorities right, like me. Nice house - junk heap car. Amicable amigos. Not just rooted but with many rooting dearly for her.

Others can see what I can see too. A flower head that whilst beaming brightly is laying on the ground. The stalk is absent.

People can be intimidated by beauty. People leave more space around attractive ones. A fear of looking stupid prevails and people make a hasty exit as soon as they feel vaguely unwelcome. Not me. I am not going to be intimidated by what is essentially a school teacher. I frown at those that curtsy or bend down to empresses; It is degrading and not something I would ever do. Hence a teacher, who is far from scarce in the land I live, is not going to be put on a pedestal. I have never lusted over Laura. Drawn towards her as she contrasts all others. I really like looking at her. Intently. How many of us are prepared to admit that they have spent an age imagining physical interactions with those they adore? In this case the intercourse and intimate exploration would be a single course of many in an extended banquet. For me, what is more covetable is the play. The mix of grappling and toying - mentally. The being, being there. After the dinner there is the dance, then the holidays and time building things. They are what make being with someone significant.

This English rose is coupled with nasty thorns that lacerated me, souring but not diminishing the desire. I failed. I fell short. I take the blame. I blamed circumstances for a while. Should I have feigned my feelings towards her and kept quiet about how much I fancied her? I genuinely thought that me seeing her again was unlikely. Luck brought her in, and bad luck took her away. Hence, finding her would have been a total waste of time were it not for the insight it gave me into how we have beliefs and deal with information. A friendship would have been sufficient. A dance conspirator most welcome. A romance was never likely. As a source of inspiration, it has been magnificent, but no more of that either. I now have a begrudging acceptance that this is the end. I have been spat out with zero.

I used to sit next to her most weeks for a few minutes before the start of class and in the interval. Some people shift a bit when you take your seat. Not once did she flinch. This was at least one respectful sign. Small things that we miss and never get to appreciate again.

Aftermath

We take stock and evaluate what we have. I sure have plenty that I get on very well with. I look back. I had a long session with another young lady, someone that seemed true to herself, helping each other in opposite dance roles. Laura walked past saying a muted goodbye without looking at either of us. A vanguard sailing off home. At the time I would have paid anything to swap this dancer with Laura. But why? Here I had someone that smiled at me every time we saw each other. I had someone that

demonstrated conviviality, showed genuine impartiality, cared and was nice to be around. We know we can't get on with all so happily ourselves with the knowledge that we are capable of forming good bonds with most people. At no point would I bother with that "I will show you". It is a feeble ploy. Some believe it will make them feel better. Maybe it does.

Some months ago, I sat there thinking about Laura. Again. Then a wave of contentment washed in. Not long before I had been battling difficult sorts. Instead of pondering how to overcome friction I was now thinking about uplifting, promising things. The wading through the philosophy, the nature of relationships and so forth was pleasant. It made me feel buoyant even though it was sailing upwind and challenging. Now it is not like that. It is has become another battle. I don't want a battle in an arena that is supposed to be uplifting leisure time. All hobbies and interests have politics. Some have politics as the key mud that the house stands upon.

I was in the process of sculpting some clay in the shape of woman. I had dug the clay from my own land and the colour was great. If one were to try filling her mouth with a liquid, the stomach fills and once full, begins to leak out of a breast. The co-considerational selfishness illustration. I told Laura about this, a mother needs to feed herself first and that we can't avoid being selfish. I have a feeling that this might have spurred Laura to take a glance at the book I had given her many months before. "Your contribution to philosophy", my parting remark. What could be the worst time for Laura to discover the section 'Laura'? It was windy that night and a gale of grief was set in motion heading towards me. She turned on the spot to face me on departure, said goodbye - giving me a look that implied I was a contemptuous schoolboy. Put me on detention Laura. Make me stay after school has closed and allow me to talk with you.

I can remove myself from the hurt. However, the temptation to push back is tremendous. The greater worry is if I am viewed as obnoxious by a cliqued few. I have seen it all before. From both sides. Group dynamics follow the same pattern. They form, they bind, they shield and defend the wall. That error made a year before resonates loudly now. I had a chance to bed myself in with certain people and didn't take it. The hints that I should go to various events were repeated week after week and I ignored them. I must have been very occupied in other areas. I think I recall being plain silly. How many times do I have to say the same thing? In a century or so a whole bunch of others will be doing similar things and using some of your molecules Laura. I know the path into a group and can choose to head that way when I want to. If you were in the slightest bit unsure: Show up, show up, turn

up, be there again and again. Listen for most of the time. Gradually add to the conversations. Never make any suggestions. Keep at it and one night you find yourself included.

I know secrets unite people so will use one soon. We tell select people a secret to make them feel part of a club. This can be a useful tool to use. Being in the know makes people feel more important. This is distinct from the ploy used by attention seekers who say something is a secret to magnify its significance and thereby ensure it gets more notice.

Some of us do not want to be defeated. So, we persist and try to win at any cost, at any sensible price. Taking defeat is hard, but that was not central to the problem. There were multiple upsides to winning her over. I have known for a while that what I find most gratifying is people. I have the diminishing returns problem in both work and carnal pleasures. To get reward I now need to work ten times harder for the same feel-good hit in those areas.

Forced separations are commonplace. Some have been sent eternally into the ether. Nations have been split bludgeoning families. Petty feuds have kept many apart. There are divisions in relationships as there are divisions in prosperity. Lots of lonely souls yearning for companionship and that human touch. I am one of the ungrateful ones that have had plenty of chances, chances that I missed and chances that I didn't let slip. I am nothing but greedy. Why not. I have been gluttonous with my use of resources without making me obese. I have explored lust to a ludicrous degree and can't imagine what others have not been able to experience. Now I want more. A new angle. A new direction. A new harvest. I have enough wealth of time and still sufficient will to have a go before the mind is retiring and body is failing. I just wish I had more patience. I am sure a reader might like to hear Laura's side of the story. Maybe you will one day for what it is worth. This is after all a mere tale of blowing things out of all proportion. It meant a lot to me though. Pain makes you feel alive. We may try to avoid tensions, but the edginess and discomfort are moving so long as it is in moderation.

How special was Laura? We think of someone as being quite ordinary and then get to know them. We then reassess them entirely. We start to think of them as being special and above so many others. Charm works by making someone feel special and unique. The biggest rarity about Laura was that she was potent and not already taken. What chance had I with someone that needs nobody, has pride in her situation and refuses to give credit to those that have guided her. Inner beauty can get you so far but is no match for lust. Love follows where lust leads. In most cases anyway. Don't argue with me, nature has nature's way. I know we

can use our body to get out of poverty. Some get a piece of the pie by being able to provide for them, a means of escape.

A chip and a chair

I have seen a doleful soul sitting with one chip, their last single chip, at the poker table with their adversaries having greedily amassed significant stacks. One bit of luck after another led to two chips then four and so on until they won the tournament. My chip took the form of an endearing dancer, Megan. She needed a dance partner now that she had seen sense and dispensed with a rueful love-not-to-be partner. It really is good fortune. Destiny works in odd ways. Megan's timing was impeccable. She was also a true joy to dance with. Plus, I now get to make real strides in learning the follow.

I got a smile! A first. Tentative steps but alas no matter how much patience I give it, nothing will bring her back onside now. A minor mental scar has sealed the place where a little warmth once stood. Though she did soften, and things became amicable. Laura reinvigorated my desire to dance and gave it more depth. She inspired me to break rank with the masses and make strides in the media world. She sparked the thinking behind small things, inner beauty, and beliefs. She made me focus on what is most valuable.

And the most valuable thing right now is close to me. Linked. Me over her shoulder in a zen slow trance. Lost in the loud music supplied by headphones, closed off from the rabble in a sensory intimacy. Megan is half my age and twice as decent. My tendency to bend rules enables us to transform the experience of dancing endlessly with just one person. I change the pace mid song from rapid moves to a virtual standstill building back again. Sometimes to the beat but more often to the flow of the music instead. Fifteen styles in fifteen dances, short songs through to extended versions of great classics. I am the rare sort that puts drama into dance, making it rather more exciting. My affable buddy described it as euphoric. This young lady fulfilled a pair of significant dreams. I won't have this idiosyncratic compact dance buddy and temporary inamorata forever so will make the most of it. Nothing is forever. Nothing.

Men have feelings too. Anything that dents a woman, can dent a man in the same way. Culture and society play a part in the perception, but how we are hurt, how we are enthralled, how we take and not return the favour is not specific to any gender. I had forgotten how enthralling the early stages of intimacy were. I had an option now to try a whole new branch on the tree. I had become stuck on a specific intimacy twig. Gratifying though it was, I had missed out on the refreshing nature of the simple natural human physicality. Arousal from the connectedness.

Many are over keen to move things forward. Others are shy and fearful. They are held back from initiating intimacy. This restraint can turn into a phobia of sorts. Some become incapable of making a move. They retreat, escaping to avoid it. One thing to remember is that the desire to have sex depends on the individual not the gender. It has nothing to do with being a boy, girl, or 'freak'. The proportion of men wanting sex is the same as the proportion of women. We can start with caressing the face and move south. I would expect most to understand that being willing to stop is paramount. There is no excuse for overriding an objection by force.

Megan was bullied at school for having sexual encounters. No such bullying would have happened were she a boy. Boys have always been treated differently to girls in the realms of sexual activity. In extreme cases young ladies have been decapitated when found in a compromising position with a man. Had Megan pronounced that the sex was good, enjoyable - nothing to be ashamed of then the bullies would have left her in peace. To make matters worse her family scolded her for having a romantic encounter with someone older. They are no better than the bullies. Some cultures have formally arranged marriages. In other cultures, it is not quite so formal. We simply give people dirty looks and condemn their choice. We think we can choose who we marry, but the heady influence of others can deny us that choice.

Thousands of teenagers up and down the land see people like Laura and compare themselves to her. They want to hide their imperfections but no matter how hard they try they are not happy with the way they look. They begin to dislike themselves. I will let you in on something. I fancied Laura a lot. However, Megan turned me on. Laura didn't. I was gravitated towards Laura for sure. Beauty is a treasure. While it lasts.

The world has a system that only suits some. It wants to test and examine how good you are compared with everyone else. Schools grade you. Society grades you. Employers grade you. I started to take more notice of Megan when I discovered how bright she was. I become more attracted to her when I realised how adept she was in unusual ways. The problem for you, for her and many others is that her intelligence is useless in certain quarters. You can't take exams in what she is good at. She got marked down as a failure. She is not a failure. The system is a failure. She did fine running her own business. Others have done equally badly at school and became super rich. You will find your niche, your forte. We believe that other people are cleverer than us. More intelligent. They are cleverer than you in different ways. There will be things that you will be better at than them though.

Nothing matters. Not really. What counts is the acceptance of who you are. You have to acknowledge who you are, what your limitations are. You will also discover that some people will like you just the way you are. Megan appealed to me more and more as time went by. She began to impress me more and more. It took a while to 'get' her and appreciate who she was. I fell in love. I assured myself that we had enough in common, had a similar outlook, a closely matched taste in music, and believed in the same things. The things that I regarded as important were present. Megan never needed to read the chapter, conversation; some will shine brighter when they do. I have been chasing the wrong thing all my life. Sort of.

We aren't supposed to undress someone in our head and fantasise things. However, I now do. That way you can detach the superficiality or the ordinariness or the oddness and see the light.

Loss

Move on say they that have not experienced the full wrecking effect of loss. Some will suggest that a year of mourning is acceptable. To reinforce this attitude, they will reply to your musings about your loss with a few seconds of silence followed by a complete change of subject. The power of minimising your suffering stems from the naivety, the inexperience and lack of compassion. Pretending to care is better than trotting out platitudes and the standard lines. More is to be gained from talking to the one you have lost, daily, hourly sometimes. You are not insane. You have joined a club that practice this routine until they pass away into the ether, gone too and it no longer matters. Someone anew can enter your life and provide adequate distraction and compensation. Yet, the loss lingers. We ask the wrong question. It is not, what to do to make things heal, but why would you want to forget and lose even more. Forgetting about the departed and moving on is adding to the loss.

My mother and father's daughter said to me in a critical tone that everything I do is always bigger, better, and more grandiose. Maybe that is not becoming of me to be like that. Maybe I could win competitions and collect prizes for being the greatest narcissist of the day. Or that the things I have done are indeed bigger, better, and more grandiose than her. Why shy away from talking about the subject of grief, loss, and personal sufferance when you can boast about it. So, whether you lost a partner through ill health or had the most unwelcome unexpected breakup imaginable or suffered sexual abuse as a child, you can speak about it boastfully. You can recant the details of endurance, coming out the other side, and how it made you such a finer person thereafter. You choose the benefit and highlight the enduring pain that loss brings. Loss of innocence and loss of

control in the case of childhood horrors. Boasting is contentious in this area. Contentious things attract significant interest and debate.

My loss entailed losing someone that listened rather than say yes and change the subject. I lost someone that I could explore the world with and explore the things that I hold dear. Dance, art, deep conversations, and unbridled intimacy. The loss holds a unique bugbear, for it was not though accident or misfortune that the loss occurred, but the result of spiteful, discriminatory scum pressure. Pus spoken with the pretence they were on the right side of moral reasoning. Sentences that passed an ill-judged sentence on me. She had the perfect physical form with buckets of unquenched curiosity. Living in the moment is only surpassed by living in the moment with someone that engages with the moment, engages with the environment, and sees opportunity around us. My loss is bigger than any of your losses for it happened to me. I too care most about me. We all care about me. Unless it is about someone that affects me. That is human, animal reality. We are too optimistic, too hopeful that others will show deep meaningful interest in our loss. You may find another word to replace boast but what you won't replace is the power that concept has with making people engage with your grief. Boast, then listen, then debate, then see others sharing their feelings towards loss with you.

Time heals a little bit until a reminder smacks your chest hard, making blood rush up into your face. You really feel it. A physical emotional jolt of terrifying alarm. Light headiness and fractional faint. For a moment you think that the impossible has happened and that the loss was a dream. The scar is torn open again. You are alone in your lust for what once was. It is a devil to deal with the chemical shock that pervades your body for the rest of the day. No distraction makes the discomfort vanish. No more tears left to cry it out. When people say one needs to be strong, that isn't the half of it. Philosophical medicine lasts longer than surrendering yourself to the knockout effects of wine. A deep breath, a bath, a walk, a talk again to the departed, a treat, each little step gets you closer to getting through to bedtime. I need a plan. I need to see what that reminder is telling me. It has given me a clue. I know from my history that I was bolder the second time. The plan before was enacted and became an erotic highlight in my passing through time. Ponder, plot, plan, enact something worthwhile.

Curiosity drives us in useful powerful ways, but it also messes with our handling of loss. Selfishness is always there, and the wretched reward machine has gotten thirsty. The return of the lost one would sate all three drives simultaneously. Damn. If only.

Power, control and the desire to be needed

In our home, in the workplace and in the government, disguised or blatant as day we have something important working away; power, control, or some wish to feel needed. How many of us have no craving for any power whatsoever? Very few would be my answer. You may not want to be a politician that sets the tax rates for everyone in the country, instead you set the bed time for your children. Power is relative. It may be that our partner has more control over the children than you, but do you like that sense of being a help to others? Does your partner care where you are? Do they care what time you will get home? You may like that thought of being missed if you are late or disappear. Those that feel needed by their family get a sense of place and reason to be. Being alone, ignored, never called upon is desolate. Those that claim they have no interest in controlling or guiding others would have to be someone that never sets rules, never tries to get others to follow their lead, never be the keyholder and live alone. Very few of us are completely devoid of all power facets. The truth is we like to have some usefulness and want to be needed. It is a big part of our integral selfish mechanism. Wielding power is rewarding.

Power is used to **make changes**, whether welcome or unwanted. I am not the only one that likes making the decisions. It can be truly great being able to tell people what to do. Some businesses have lots of disgruntled customers and the management fail to address the problems. The staff point out the problems and when the management fail to take heed frustration sets in. Some people then take it upon themselves to set themselves up in business, a new business that is better. You can make the changes needed when in control that address failings that used to leave customers feeling dissatisfied.

Now that you are at the helm of the business, or running the country, you encounter a time management problem. All that power at your disposal has limitations. A powerful person is no all-seeing god. There is a **limit to power**. Whilst you focus your time on one area, other areas become neglected. You can't have it both ways, power, and control over everything. This gives rise to delegation. People in power are essentially delegators. Their skill is providing the motivation and inspiration to those under them. No nation, no sizeable business is built single handedly. Those in charge choose who to employ. They will often employ people with better technical skills than them. Decent employees will do their duty and more, show creativity and flourish with just

a simple sure sign of appreciation from those above them. They don't need managers standing over them watching their every move. Empower or micro-manage at your peril.

There is a limit to the reach of your power. Even in the harshest most controlling states, you can't get into the minds of the daydreamer. Lots are indifferent to you and your actions. They have a love life and care nothing about your projects. They get on with their things and escape, if need be, to the woods or to another state. People have tried to get their tentacles infiltrating into every crevice, into every area imaginable. The lives of the lowly are not left alone. The lowly look forward to the day your reign is over and make do with what they can get away with until then. Our power rises and falls, fluctuating for many reasons.

In some circles popularity helps you **cement power**. Popularity is not the same as being universally liked. Being popular means people listen to you. Popular people are the centre of attention. In other walks of life, it is popular ideas that get people's attention. Presentation is everything. Effective presentation needs to be clear and professional. We believe information far more if it is presented well. How it is presented and by who, matters enormously. Little credence is given to the same facts presented poorly. Hence, people dress to impress.

In theory, to gain power one might make every effort to get credited with all the good achievements and remain silent about the not so good. Only do the sacking and reprimanding when you have no one else to do it. Create an image of being masterful at everything. If you choose to do the reverse of all these power tricks, you can become greatly admired rather than greatly grating. Many will work hard to climb the tree of domination to have more people below them working according to their fundamentals. Whether it is in the workplace or the worship halls, power is the key item that provides the impetus to ascend. It takes a lot of study and a lot of effort to get it.

Someone gets to be the leader when enough accept them as leader. So long as people keep believing in you, you can stay in charge. There is nothing mystical about leadership, just **belief** and faith we put in the person at the centre. Qualifications give people belief that you are worthy of being an instructor, but those with qualifications may not be better at instructing than those without them. Qualifications provides credibility and thus belief that they know what they are talking about. How many qualified people follow best practice? Qualifications may be essential in the medial field for example but are only the starting point of a journey.

People will follow rules without a clue as to where they came from and why they exist. A lady cut the ends off her ham before putting it in the oven. She did so because her mum would cut the

ends off. And her mum did this because she copied her mother. When the lady asked her grandmother why? She found out that it was so that it would fit in the tray she used. We are controlled by conditioning. I asked why dance moves were invariably done right-handed. Confusion reigned supreme when I began to do them left-handed. People are far too accustomed to learned behaviour. It is just how it is done say they. We become conditioned and condition the next person in line.

How can we counter the over-powerful and **depose** them? Well, everyone in power has a weakness and a vulnerability. Very few in charge will be strong enough to resist being involved in unacceptable behaviour of one sort or another. It is the way in. Focus and concentrate the efforts on the most disgusting aspect and you hit all the followers. No followers no power. Print simple posters with key points and place them prominently and pervasively. The more the message is seen the more people will have greater self-assurance that a challenge is valid. It tears down some doubts. Anonymous dissent may seem weak but when the balance of power on hand is so skewed towards insanity, it is the only way initially.

People have this belief that they are right and only their views count. When people become so vigorous in defence of their ideas, they employ a range of tactics to get people to succumb to their standpoint. The fear of violence is a greater weapon than the actual deeds themselves. You do not have to kill every single detractor, just hang one from a lamp post and serve it as a warning. Only those that consider their life worthless will continue any struggle. People who make a vocal stand can be dealt with in many ways. Ban them from talking. Put out a torrent of messages that counter theirs. Provide evidence that there are thousands in support of you. Send them a death threat. Shout them down in the street with a simple slogan. Discredit them with some small innocuous fiction that can be turned into fact. Spread the idea far and wide giving people hope and reason while refraining from doing the dirty work. If the idea punches hard enough then dopey comrades will take action on their own, on your behalf.

Every great person is just that, a person. Why we fear the aura around a top snake is strange. Why those in regular close quarters do not bite the head off is equally peculiar. It is as if the one who is instigating hideous acts of violence is protected by a mythical life force that we do not dare trespass upon. They were born small and feeble as the next man in line and grow in stature only by our own weird reverence. Do we see them as the only one who could keep command? People's time comes to an end sooner or later. It is humiliating to be pushed off the stage, ejected, far

removed from when you leave with the majority wishing you remain.

Ideas are forced upon us by making some subjects **taboo**. There is often no room given for debate nor dialogue. Voices are just shut down, muted, or drowned out by persistent messaging. It has become dangerous in some nations to voice our opinions. We lose our way. Some people believe that the truth is being held from them. In some cases, they may be right. The only way to discern truth from exaggeration and lies is to counter preposterous crazy things with sensible argument. With a bit of rounded explanation, you can work on people's folly. You may reduce the number of wild thoughts that they have lingering in their minds. In the process other people will be listening in and they too will be wondering about the same thing. The nationwide enthusiasm for that viewpoint becomes tempered as a result. You won't change the opinions of them all, but if you clamp down, they will carry on seeking redress and action based on ignorance.

Power needs truth, incomplete truth. Politics, science, and information distributors will include what they want to include to support their agenda. Information that runs counter to their central aim is held back.

We all like to be heard. Sometimes to bemoan our relatively small issues or bring people's attention to notable problems. We don't want issues ignored. Many implore the masses to take notice of their grievances. The number of activists behind a movement can be small. People are adept, clever, and cunning particularly when they make it seem that the whole country is behind them, when most are saying nothing. A protest may have thousands of supporters, tens of thousands even, but in many cases, it is not at all representative of the majority. Those in power must balance the impression the protest is making against the real feeling of anger amongst the wider population and not bend to every appeal.

The family unit provides a melting pot of power over the children, control over their actions and a feeling of being needed. Once they leave home, a parent may miss that sense of being required and get a wave of redundancy wash over them. It gets worse when your lifelong partner passes away too. It no longer matters if you are held up at work for there is nobody at home to care whether you get back at a certain time anymore.

That sense of being a player is more attractive than being on the side-lines in every aspect of life. Having people depend on you to some extent is an embodiment of the desire to be needed. It is not a bad thing for it is rather a nice feeling to be wanted sometimes. Power is not always objectionable, it is rather unavoidable in many circumstances, a fact of life. Whether you

are the best map reader by far, or the only person that can drive a vehicle, some sense of importance materialises. You may make the rules outside of the home and the partner gets the last word on everything within it, or the other way around.

Family feuds usually revolve around the power facet. It can be used by some to be the facilitator, the one to bring people together or conversely to maintain a separation. To glean all the attention or be the one in the background doing things to assist without taking all the credit. Small things escalate and nobody wants to back down and lose credibility. It is always to the good of those wielding the control stick and not in the best interests of those caught in the middle.

It will always be me me me no matter how you try and hide it. Caring about what others do, in how it plays out in how you feel. Everything is about the self, from the self, directed to the self or circling around back to the self. Your contribution, your input, you in the frame, your relevance and your point of view taken from the camera angle in your head. **Influence** is an expression of power.

A high percentage of those in power politically, care more for being right in their arguments and swaying as many people as possible than wishing to make changes for the common good. Winning the debate ranks higher than helping the distraught. Facts and figures are easily buried beneath emotive arguments as so many can be conned by linguistic trickery. I am not picking my nose; I am cleaning my nose. This does not smell; it has a distinct aroma. I am discerning rather than fussy. I am not manipulative, I am persuasive. Countless other examples can be found by those in power to slow our reaction - by baffling us. Anything to make it seem decent rather than foul. Find an individual case and make a heart-warming story of how they have had their life transformed so that hundreds of others who are suffering can be brushed aside. Governments make decisions that affects lots of people - the macro scale, but can highlight micro incidents, good minor deeds that they have done to keep themselves in authority.

There are a good few that want power to increase their sense of self-worth, to glean attention and feel worthy. They will expend untold energy obtaining power but offer little at the end by way of doing anything useful. People fall for these snakes and get bitten further on down the line by them, usually when it is too late to stop all their counterproductive actions taking their toll.

In the extreme, there are those with the godly power of deciding who will live and who will die, who will be saved and who will be spared. Those in healthcare face decisions that affect lives. That is an inherent part of the job. Ordinary folk express control when

they give to the causes of their choice. You select and determine who will benefit.

Much of what we say is mere rhetoric. The words we utter are perpetually trying to sway the listener towards our way of thinking. We try to convince others that we are right, and they are wrong. We give advice and try to influence others. We do this gleefully. Our achievements don't count for much unless lots of people know about them. These marvellous things we have done or discovered can be simply for our own self-satisfaction. However, people take great pleasure in broadcasting their findings. Note the big grins on their faces. See the delight they get from spreading the message.

Those who really believe the world revolves around them, the full-on narcissists, do not like being ignored. When you go about your business ignoring them, they up the ante. They want control over you. They want a reaction. Some salivate over seeing you get angry. Playing it down and detaching yourself is easier said than done.

What do micro societies, gangs want really? Respect. Acknowledgement. Influence. Credence. Taken seriously. They are never smitten by the idea of backing down. **Pride** is pleasure. We want to count. Beauty is power too. Refusing to talk to someone is power. The self at the centre of it all.

There is a lot of fun and games to be had when you learn how to swallow your pride. Once you can cope with it, once you have no problem with burying your pride, you can have pride in your ability to bury your pride. Some may pretend to be a bit naïve, allowing others to think they are a bit stupid for a while. They need to put them straight at some point though. To show them, to regain the pride in themselves. What if you stop caring about proving yourself? There are many instances where you may never meet these people again anyway, but you want to keep your head held high. The temptation to come out with the truth and reveal your position is immense. We revel in that moment of glory and love that moment of attention. It is a small moment of glory though, and it undermines the bigger game you were playing. I suspect spies never get the glory and make do with a little personal satisfaction instead of public acknowledgement of their endeavours. Keeping focus on the long game and the ultimate prize helps you bury your pride today for a substantially bigger reward in the future. Do not worry about what people think here and now. Let them feel superior. Score a goal in the bigger competition instead – later – maybe, maybe not. If not, then you take pride in your resilience.

Arguments

The advert read "Leather backed, fully reclining comfort chair. Five Year guarantee." The price seemed reasonable going by the picture and description. After paying for one, people received a leather backed, fully reclining chair that was rather smaller than they thought it would be, one which could fit in the palm of your hand. Ideal for a dolls house.

A chair provides an excellent example of how you can picture one in your head, but I can guarantee the one you will be thinking of will be quite different to that in the minds of others. A typical chair may have four legs, but a chair is still a chair irrespective of the number of legs it has. Some have arm rests and a back whilst some do not. A chair can still be considered to be a chair even when it is not something you can sit on. How do you definitively distinguish a chair from a stool or decide when it is no longer a chair? If you have a set of pieces cut to length and begin to screw them together, at what point does it become a chair. When does it end being so when you smash it into tiny pieces?

Cakes are taxed, biscuits are not. A cake goes hard, a biscuit goes soft and that is how they can be distinguished for tax purposes. If chairs are taxed and stools not, then perhaps we can market what resembles a chair as a stool. We call upon someone that has the authority to make individual distinctions. So much of life relies on human interpretation. Objects can be difficult to precisely define.

You can show someone to be wrong whatever answer they give to a question. Hold three cigarettes in your hand and ask them, "Are there two cigarettes in my hand?" If they say yes, there are two then they can disagree saying that there are three. If they say no then you can argue that there are two cigarettes, which is a true statement. Unless one specifies with better precision "Is the number of cigarettes equal to two?" (No less than, no more than) then you can invite some argument. Some people will reply, when asked the same question, "Cigarettes are bad for you", and the debate will continue at a complete and frustrating tangent.

People will dismiss what you have to say. They will attempt to nullify your argument. Brush you aside. It doesn't matter if there is any merit in what you put forward. They don't take on board what you suggest nor provide justified counter arguments. They will quickly class what you are saying as being nihilistic, absolutism, solipsism or equal to some theorem or another. Our ideas are pigeonholed and ignored. For a start many would not be too sure what these terms really mean. Secondly it is a way of saying that your idea has already been examined and can be discounted. There are plenty of ploys used to sabotage a debate.

We twist words and utilise various fallacies to complicate things. It can become a mindless mind game. It then takes a long time to break down the linguistic devices to get somewhere.

Not all languages have as much ambiguity as others, but where there is more than one meaning of a word you can be sure that someone will use the other to trash what you are saying. We can pick out an element of an idea and run with it ignoring the central point. I was involved in a discussion about what responsibilities we have towards our neighbours. It is an ethical debate. However, the discussion never got onto ethics it simply focused on what a neighbour is. Are they those living next door, in the same street, or on adjacent farm miles away? If you said to someone that you saw your neighbour on a train, they would understand that you meant someone living near you. The questioner was asking about the level of care we feel we may have towards our neighbours, not what a neighbour is. Their interest lay in possible obligations we may have regarding people living close by. You were hoping for some insight into ethics, but instead you get caught up in a battle of defining things that are not essential to your query.

In a crowd of spectators cheering their team on, there are a small bunch that are ready for a fight. They are more interested in fighting one another than watching the game. So too in the field of philosophy we have many that are more interested in a verbal fight than wishing to explore a subject. They use the most sophisticated language to make them appear above everyone else. Rather than throwing violent punches they play games to show off and demean people.

Some philosophy is inane senseless trite. Gibberish is wheeled out. Does a branch that falls in a forest make a sound if there is no one there to hear it? A soundwave is vibrations - often from percussion so nothing clever nor noteworthy in that question. The branch will hit something causing vibrations. Someone listening does not affect the creation of those vibrations. A passive observer is never required for things to take place.

Qualified

It may be advisable to value the opinions of those with formal qualifications, but some are stuck with conventional thinking. The opinions of the common man can have just as much value. It depends on if we can muster the courage to put much faith in them. Credence is given to those with fame simply because their message has reached a wide audience.

A junior pilot was unsure about the message they heard on the radio but said nothing thinking that the captain was unlikely to make a mistake. Had he queried the take-off permission, they along with hundreds of passengers, would not have perished. If

that junior pilot was alone, they would have rechecked with the control tower. They lost the courage to say something because they were sitting next to someone they held in high regard. Pilots have since been taught to believe in themselves and speak up if in doubt. We all make mistakes.

I would rather get some clarification even it invites the odd snigger. I don't worry a great deal about what people think of me. I feel it is better to be reassured than blindly assume that all is well. A mile from an airport, a quite large one, the controller asked me if I had the field in sight. "Err, negative, field not in sight." I heard a little chuckle in the controller's voice. Most usually see the runway well before that point, but it is so much better to take an instruction, be directed and not end up being a real idiot. People soon forget little instances like this but point out big errors.

If you break apart the word expert into ex and pert you can re-evaluate the meaning. An ex is something that used to be the case as in ex-partner and pert being pertaining. Thus, expert could be someone who used to have a lot of knowledge on a subject. Therefore, that expert may have wisdom that is not useful anymore. You can break things apart like this and come up with countless arguments, some with merit and some without.

Exceptions can be a lever into the cracks of an argument. I say dogs have four legs. You say that is not always the case. Observant people will point out that they have seen three legged dogs so stating that all dogs have four legs is not necessarily true. And quite correct they are as some will lose a leg through injury and may even be born like that. This is a distraction away from the understanding that the genes of most dogs have a built-in scheme for it having four legs. Sometimes it will be necessary to be very precise and complete in presenting an argument, but quite often you will get those that bring up irrelevances rather than exceptions. Some arguments are pedantic and whimsical.

In the early years of astronomy, it became possible to predict to a high degree of accuracy the relative position of where planets will be at a future point in time. Except one did something strange. They had a choice, either throw out the science of the reliable nature of the planetary orbital motions or work out why this particular one was odd. It turned out that something else was at play causing the difference and creating this exception. There can be a lot of searching for ever more reasons why, giving rise to the oft quoted remark; the more we find out the more questions we have.

Statistics can be used to 'prove' you are right. A sector of the economy was shown to be in decline year after year. As a proportion of all economic activity the percentage was indeed

dropping, but the value was actually rising every year. It was just that other parts of the economy were rising much faster making that sector appear to be reducing. Seeing it as going up or down depends upon which way you want to present it. If something is said to have shot up 50% it can sound alarming until you read the detail; the cases rose from 4 to 6 out of 100000. People choose what to compare things with. Comparing our nation with those close by paints a very different picture to comparing our nation with some more distant but with similar demographics. Our nation may spend less on some items than our neighbouring nations, but it is in fact much higher than larger economies.

Full story

Arguments and laziness go hand in hand. I have spoken to people who found it odd that 'the moon doesn't rotate' – that although it wobbles, we never get to see the other side from earth. On an on they went about it. In one tenth of the time that they spent talking about this they could have looked up the reason. The moon has a bulge produced by gravity that locks it in place.

The moon seems to come up quite a bit in relation to truth and reason. People insinuate that those that claimed to be the first to land, did not. It was all one big hoax. This implies that the astronauts were lying, the scientists were withholding the truth, the thousands of people supporting the mission were either being duped too or were in on the deception. I have found it rather fun to turn the tables on those that are calling honourable decent people into question. I question what they do, hint at the idea that they are not really who they say they are. I will cast doubt on their qualifications suggesting that they cheated at all their exams. If they run a business, I will propose that they are conning their customers. It doesn't take long to find some aspect of their life that can be made to look highly dubious. Then I ask how they feel when being looked upon as a fraudster.

What if the holiday snaps taken on the moon were touched up, altered, or even recreated? Having spent a considerable sum on the travel it is indeed tempting to present the expedition in the best light. It does not mean the trip did not take place. Suspect behaviour doesn't justify throwing the whole story in the bin.

It can be frowned upon to encourage children of school age to do shoe shinning by giving them your business when they ought to be in class. I was approached by a shoe shiner and relented. I enquired as to whether he had been to school that day. He said that they had been since early morning. He claims, and I have little reason to doubt him, that he works in the afternoons to get a little extra money. I then set him a little maths test, basic arithmetic and sure enough using some charcoal on the back of his hands he answered the questions correctly. Considered judgements arise

from finding out more. Maybe you could argue that the time would be better spent doing homework, but realities of being poor need to be taken into account. A good argument comes from thorough research. When new facts may come to light further on down the line, they change the picture completely. Parts from an aeroplane were found 11 miles from a crash site. That is some distance and would indicate, incorrectly, that it broke up in the air. It was 11 miles by road, the driver proved it by filming the odometer going from zero to eleven. What you did not get to see is that they drove all the way around the lake. It was in fact as the crow flies from point to point only 1 mile away.

Open-mindedness

Some people proudly claim that they are open minded, open to a whole spectrum of new theories. However, no matter how open-minded you try to be, surely you will be inclined to dismiss the ridiculous. Is it productive to teach children in school the idea that there are two possibilities of where they came from; One being that they were conceived and carried in their mother's womb or that they were carried in hanging from the beak of a stork? A truly open-minded individual would regard the latter as being unworthy of any proper consideration because it cannot be substantiated in the same way as the former. You can witness the baby coming out, you can see the tummy get bigger and bigger, you can use a scanning machine to have a look. You can even watch a sperm make its way to an egg. Saying that we all arrive by virtue of a stork is a metaphor for countless other unlikely propositions. We can show people that their thoughts are misguided, taking the time to explain rather than putting them down.

After years of discussion, looking at things from many angles, tedium sets in. We no longer feel the need to re-examine certain topics. We came to some conclusion on the subject, and it is unlikely to ever change. We stick to past experiences and put a mental seal around things that we consider to be the best policy. We become tired of the debate. The older we get the less likely we are to explore new avenues of thought. For this reason and more we learn that some people are not worth arguing with.

The philosopher's curse

Philosophy is renowned for its complex language and so much debate around the semantics - meanings of many words. Getting wrapped up in the language is a daft trap. Keeping it complicated, by using rare and clever sounding words is most useful in the business of excluding undesirables. A trick employed by many a society and numerous clubs to keep them out. What is equally alarming is that we don't always realise that our jargon that seems so common in our circle is completely bewildering to the

majority. If most people don't understand most of the concepts written here, then this text is even more of a failure. I hope some find what is presented here profitable in some way.

What is philosophy anyway? The skeleton of the truth? Scratching an itch? Looking for answers through discussion and thought? It only has utility when shared - when tested on others. If you make a conjecture and gauge the reaction from others and mould it based upon the response, we can say it has been tested. The more people that agree and concur the more merit it appears to gain.

I like to make a proposition, no matter how outrageous and provide some argument, ideas that support it. Sometimes we need to stick to our opinion despite the opposition. Throw out the nonsense, the plain crazy ideas and see where it leads. One can try to distil the information from others and where necessary home in on the bit that seems to contain the error. You must remain resolute, holding out long enough to make progress. However, various objections come along, and it can be a problem if we are too stubborn to change direction. A good few people don't get this balance right. People can be right for the wrong reasons. Some highlight problems in your argument, which means you have to think about it more before letting go of that idea. Being dogmatic is also fatal, not life threatening always, but if your proposition fails test after test then it more than likely needs to be modified or rejected. Saying that nothing is absolute, and everything will always be open to question may be correct to a point, but it can be a curse. Leaving it be, can be unsatisfactory. With some determination to see things through, we usually reach clarity on a subject.

'The only way' section shows an absolute and provides the foundation to understand the definitive structure of the universe. However, due to the extreme complexity that results and because of the existence of random chaos it is indeed very hard to be absolutely certain of very much at all.

Locating that error step

A lengthy argument can be built on logical steps. Whilst the argument seems rational and quite convincing, you sense something is erroneous. Your aim is to find that one small piece that contains the mistake. This is another way to look at philosophy, getting to the core of the truth. Some like to win the argument by any means. Others do not care who is right or wrong, they want to know the reasons why they are wrong. Along the way we may highlight aspects we do like about someone's idea. Curiosity allows us to make the light people offer us even brighter and split it into its colours.

If someone was adhering to the stoic philosophy, they would be able to differentiate between what they can change and what they can't. They accept that there is nothing they can do about certain things so there is little point losing sleep over it. The error would be found in what they differentiated. They believed something could not be changed, but with more will and more people wanting change, change can be possible in some situations.

I get irritated whenever I attempt a cryptic crossword. Even with the answers, I don't always see the connection. Would I get better, go from zero answers to a good few with some practice? Maybe, but the clues make me irritable, so I steer clear of them. My frustration with these cryptic crosswords has a parallel with the frustration others have with deep conversations. I therefore understand why they prefer to change the subject when discussions get too deep. We have memories of sad times and bad events in our lives. When we think about these it can sour our mood. Hence, it is understandable that people avoid getting drawn into conversations that bring up things that they would rather forget.

The flaws within language create a lot of argument. The word selfishness has many meanings in each context and requires thought beyond the dictionary definition. Curiosity is not just the wish to understand a big problem, it arises in much simpler everyday forms. Where did I leave that book? - is as much about curiosity as what you might hope to learn from it. Words are concepts in themselves, and they trigger a set of other thoughts. In many cases we don't have a word for an idea, but that doesn't stop us using the tool of language to get an idea across to someone else. Pain and suction exemplify the point. Pain can be an aggravating signal for some or a joyous feeling in others. Pain can be linked with reward.

Vacuum cleaners do not suck up dirt. There is no suction in physics. The dirt gets blown into them. However, the concept of sucking up things stands. We understand what someone means by it. Whatever you begin debating there is always going to be a problem with the multiplicity of language. You may have five thousand words at your disposal enabling millions of combinations, which is then multiplied by the number of different meanings to each word. Change one word in the sentence and a whole new avenue of thought can open up. By mincing the meaning of a word, the argument deviates from what someone was arguing about.

Mothers have told me that they enjoyed giving birth. They enjoyed the pain during labour. Women will instantly say, "only a man would say that." I said women told me that they enjoyed

giving birth. Would you undertake an operation without pain killers they ask? I said that women have said they did not need any pain killers during their labour. Not all women, some women. It is what women have told me. There is a temptation to talk about the pain I have endured but that takes the argument away from child birth. If more women understood that the pain can be embraced rather than feared and masked, then it could be helpful to some. Some, not all. It won't help someone that is in labour for twenty-four hours. It may help a small but significant percentage of women. Deviating away from the central premise elongates arguments. Stick to talking about your initial proposition.

The joy of language can be found in many situations. I recall someone warning me of the monkeys that were "very thief". I understood what they were saying despite the grammatical error. I question how often we spoil a discussion by being pedantic when we fully understood what someone was saying.

"I need some money."

"You don't *need* money, you would like some money."

"I would like a cake and I need money to buy it."

Winning an argument can lead to a loss of friendship. You may prove you are right but the person having their error pointed out may like you a lot less after. Hence, we often let things go unless showing someone they are wrong is vitally important.

We argue to get things done, to get changes made. Real progress is made when agreement is reached. When people have gone to war, one side will end up agreeing to sign some form of treaty or armistice.

It is hard for people to accept that their memory is not as good as they think it is. False memories can be implanted quite easily too. We find it hard to believe that we muddle up information - regularly. Quite a few people deny that they have got their facts wrong. More disturbingly we fail to acknowledge that people who have been raped do not store details of the events very well. Someone who provides an inconsistent account of the ordeal is highly likely to be telling the truth in these situations.

Sometimes arguments are a damn good way of venting frustration and beats aggression any day. Balance as always. Shying away too often from arguments it as damaging as arguing too frequently. Learn to argue well. Good things come from it.

Some people receive a message, one that they are not too impressed by, and send an immediate kneejerk response. Other people wait a while before they reply. By leaving it a bit, you can mull over the options and give it some proper consideration. It is amazing how much more conciliatory you are when responding

an hour or maybe a day later. It helps if people read messages they get twice. We often get the wrong idea the first time we read it. If necessary, we can acknowledge receipt of the message straight away, allow ourselves to cool down a bit then respond fully later. Powerful people delay their responses.

Write out what you would like to say. Go into all the detail. Explain how you are right, and they are wrong. Point out all the things they have done wrong. Don't miss anything out, write the whole lot down. Everything you are annoyed about. When you are happy with that, put it aside. Now write a brief consolatory response to send/publish instead.

An argument is diffused by listening. A hot head has lots to get across. I tend to hear them out. Eventually they run out of things to say, then you can work on areas of agreement. In the same way that we do not like being given advice, we do not want to be forced into changing our mind. To make any headway with the stubborn sorts, you need to ask questions that lead them to change their opinion by themselves.

Passionate people can be most endearing. Passionate ranting is a different matter. A cool, calm, collected explanation of your woes in a soft voice brings about sympathy for your situation. We all get aggrieved by injustices, unfairness, unreasonable behaviour and more, but some can't soften their vexation. We nod our heads and get out of there as fast as possible.

Petty Clare

Once a week I took Clare and Co to a venue in my car, a car share. They were never comfortable driving at night, so it was always me and my car. Clare decided to pay for my ticket to get into the venue in lieu of the cost of the fuel. This was typically 8 UOC. A year passes before one night Clare said, "it costs about 0.15 EOC per mile so is it alright if we give you 5-6 UOC from now on?" When I calculated the cost of this 82-mile round trip, in one of the most expensive cars one can buy, it is not fine at all. I am going anyway so perhaps it costs me virtually nothing - only a tiny amount of extra fuel due to adding passenger weight. I did a rough calculation, and it came to 32 UOC per trip, minimum, probably much more. Besides I run the risk of hitting one of the many potholes and damaging my car etc. Whatever it truly costs, the whole thing rankles. Even if one were to deduce that it only costs me 6 UOC, it implies that giving me 1 UOC per hour for driving is excessive. A real affront given that she will joyfully pay 25 UOC for private dance instruction. I am degraded. We are arguing over what is a tiny amount of money. Both of us are reasonably well off, rich compared to most. Squabbling over a tiny amount of money is rather petty, but pettiness has a purpose. Pettiness is each party being counsel, jury, and judge in a minor

court case drama. It helps us work out who we are. It gives us a chance to say that I am not a bedraggled underclass pushover. Dignity, respect, justice with a twist of moral compass pointing. We learn about ourselves through petty arguments. Ultimately, we can be the most impressive when we resolve petty disputes using calm, very calm composed argument. We raise the subject in the hope that we get to explain the logic, the rationale behind our position. Selfishness is written all over a petty dispute. Those that soften their position may awaken their co-considerational selfishness and show some kindness. Of course, a petty dispute is riddled with curiosity as we fact find and formulate a rebuttal.

That wisdom is built through incessant reformulation of the links in your head. Petty debates bring lots of those neural links into play. Pettiness is challenging and rewarding. Whilst some petty disputes lead to violence or people falling out, they can also lead to peace and robust friendships. We build connections with people through dogmatic determination to win a petty disagreement. These petty distinctions, these petty ploys, our petty, petty behaviour is never about the money or the thing at the centre but how we want to win and thereby keep our reputation intact. Reputation is one unit of currency in the game of life. The challenges that arise in a petty dispute help us enormously with the bigger disputes that come our way. The benefits they bring depend not so much on the outcome, not so much on whether you win or lose but how well you formulate your argument. Can you compromise if needed. Can you play the longer game if needed. Can you rebuild bridges afterwards. You might prevail in the pretty dispute but lose something far more valuable. I bet you can recall most if not all the petty disputes you had over the years and far more distinctly than many agreeable interactions.

Conversation

Some people write lists. Lists of things to get done. It can be a sure-fire way to ensure that things are indeed done and not overlooked nor forgotten. Apparently, it helps with stress for it means we can tackle things one at a time and don't become so overwhelmed. We can compile lists for others to help them get their life back on track. Here shall be a list of things I have observed during many a conversation.

1. The bore

A bore is not boring because they have a dull existence. No, it is because they talk and talk and talk. One person told me that their partner called them a bore. Their partner had encouraged them to get out of the house more. Presumably so they didn't have to keep listening to it all. Failing to allow someone even a few seconds to make a point is one of the most disliked practices known to man. A bore dominates the conversation beyond belief. I am quite sure that I am not the only one that encounters these types and struggle to get away because they just won't stop talking. Some install a secret button to trigger a phone to ring just to get out of it. I rarely accept this anymore. I will just say yes, yes, yes and butt in regardless, forcing the issue, otherwise frustration levels rise too high. Remember to use yes, yes, yes. No, no, no, doesn't work so well.

2. Echoing

Conversation is a baton. We pass it between us. Knowing when to take it, and when to hand it over, is hard skill to get right. Too many make a rather good point but undermine it by then labouring it to death. Stop. The point has been made. They understand what you are saying. There is no need to keep repeating it. The more you keep going over the same thing the more it diminishes what you are saying. People begin to disengage completely. Have your say, then leave it be.

3. Surpassing

Some people have a habit of always referring whatever you have been doing to something they have done too. This gives the impression that they are better, working harder and achieving more. This is not the same as taking on board what was said but showing that they only care about themselves. Some of us reach maturity but still seem to think that the whole world revolves around them. You have to demonstrate that you are interested in others, genuinely, if you want to avoid being stigmatised by this feeling. Many have come to realise that the one great thing that they have achieved is the ability to listen to others.

4. The detached

A doctor filmed their own consultations. When they played it back, they were shocked by what they saw themselves doing. They were surprised at how little engagement they gave their patients and by the realisation that they were not even looking at them much at all. Only by seeing their own self in action were they able to make massive improvements in their approach from then on. Few people are aware of how poorly they communicate, not many will acknowledge it and people around them are reluctant to point it out. In a group conversation we can be inclusive by looking at everyone, a brief glance, maybe a wink to acknowledge everyone present.

5. The finicky

You may think that all the little details matter, but to the audience they are irrelevant. Worrying about minor details detract from the underlying story. There is rarely much gained from correcting your partner or friend who was involved in the story. Let them tell it the way they wish to. "We got back from a nice holiday on Wednesday and landed at twelve..." A needless interruption would be "No, no it was Thursday when we returned, and it was much later than twelve o'clock." You might think it matters, but in most cases as far as the audience is concerned it makes absolutely no difference whatsoever.

6. The dry mouthed

When you get back from an outstanding trip you tell a few people about it at length. Then it gets abridged. We shorten it each time we bring it up with the next group of people. You get tired of recanting the tale as fast as people get fed up hearing about it. Hence a few neat brief sentences are all we can be bothered with at times.

7. The realist

Most things that are said are soon forgotten and if not forgotten we don't always remember who said them. However, through conversation we unburden our sorrows and share our joys. Not many master the art of what is one of the most enjoyable aspects of life, conversation. The safest option is, 'I will say what I want to say with the words of my choosing and let you do the same'.

8. The anecdotalist

Some anecdotes work well. Others, no matter how you formulate them do not. By trying them on different people we find certain ones are well received whilst others rouse little amusement or interest whatsoever. The shorter succinct ones are the best. The longer it takes the more effort required for people to hold back

from yawning. Anecdotes come out in a manner like someone hitting the play button on a machine with zero thought required. Years can pass before we discover that stories told to us were completely fabricated. We love fascinating and funny tales. Does it really matter that things were exaggerated if no one got hurt? A huge swath of entertainment is based on fiction. Films, books, programmes, theatre and so on, so why not discussions around the table too.

9. The wily

Watch out for all the gaming tricks employed by some. Intentional silences to see who breaks first rather than natural pauses. Phrases and expressions will be borrowed and copied to imitate the person they are with. Talking a bit quieter so that people unwittingly have to lean in towards them. Plus, mirroring body gestures, mimicking your actions. People remember the bearers of bad news and associate negativity with them. Hence, many will palm off the task of informing people of impending misfortunes that are looming large and be the one to let everyone know about the good things on the way.

The deferment tactic can be useful with people with deep rooted opinions. You can say “I read in a book about a certain messiah, and it gave the impression that they were a bit of a fraud” rather than “I think that messiah was a bit of a fraud”. You allow them to take offence at the book instead of you. Likewise, group X claim that this messiah in question was a bit of a fraud. The subtext is usually missed in that you are in effect handing over your own views through some third party.

The subtleties of conversation are the most enjoyable element. The bore mentioned earlier never grasped why there was a suggestion to get out more. Some will never see how they are being used and manipulated by clever language. When someone says, “go climb up the springboard and jump into the pool again, I want to see you do it again, you are good at it”, they really want some space and you at a distance. Not all notice sub text. People may decline an invite claiming they have something else to do on a certain day. An assumption can be read that they just don't want to come. Although making assumptions is fraught with misreads, you can be shown to be right 19 times out of 20 if you are good at gauging people's barely hidden signals. There are polite ways of letting people down gently. We don't want to hurt someone with the real reason but being fobbed off is often more painful. With the truth I can do something. I can change my ways.

10. To desist

Some people really hate those who interrupt. It is a morality thing at heart. Personal preference. Yet can be vital when someone is

full throttle in a lengthy diatribe. Useful if used at the right moment to keep things on subject and on track. It is also a way to verify what someone is suggesting – clarify before they move on to the next point. It can be used in a measured way with no ill effect. Balance once again.

11. The intolerant

People are what they are and objecting to belligerence, their rudeness due to the constant interruptions is not the same as obsessing about someone's hand gestures. Hand gestures can add to the story no matter how frenzied. We all have oddball twitches and mannerisms that are either piquant or off putting according to who is making the judgement.

12. Me and myself

Failure to take on board the comments and ideas of others is the crime of conversation. We respond by keeping it relevant to the subject they started. We include what they are saying rather than divert it to what matters to us.

Looking away all the time and changing the subject is the habit of the hopeless. People like talking about themselves far more than anything else. Whether it about their job, their holidays or how marvellous their children are. However, some characters always seem to have more dramatic things going on which must be announced to all and sundry. "Those with the least to say, talk the most." Allowable on occasions but irritating if it happens all the time.

If you have an interest in someone you need only keep the subject revolving around them. They will spiel endlessly giving you a chance of getting closer in their affection for you. Some can find it exhausting after a long while however, so learn when to make it more two-way. People that want to build up self-confidence will listen hard. They will spend much more time listening than talking. This is standard practice at first. It will not work if you can't make sufficient eye contact. It really fails if you show more interest in fiddling with some device all the time as this can be the height of rudeness.

13. The shut down

The shut down works like this. Waffle, waffle, and more trite waffle. This little person dominates the conversation, trampling on everyone that tries to have some say. They say yes. And that is it to whatever you say. Yes, followed by a question. The question will be unrelated to what you were talking about. The question may be directed to another person. Asking a question is usually a good sign, but in the shut down, it is a source of irritation. Whoever the question was directed to does not get a chance to respond. Within a few seconds the little person then

speaks again and dominates once more. Is there a counter to this? The best counter is to eradicate them from your life. Alternatively, let them know that they are being very rude. Or raise your voice and return to the subject you were shut down from speaking further about. The shut down doesn't seem rude, but it is extremely rude. It is clever and has a diplomatic overtone, but in truth it is very rude.

We need to eat. Most of what we eat comes out the other end. Most of what we say does not get absorbed by those we are talking to. Only a little gets absorbed. You can take two things from that. Most of what you say is superfluous and unnecessary. Talking is like eating though, it is like exercise, it is what humans need to do to stay healthy.

14. Golden silence

Unless you are locked up in a prison cell with thousands of hours to fill, protracted stories are less welcome. The most enjoyable conversations are those where people involved keep it short and to the point. It allows for greater progression and much more interesting depth as time passes. A test of how well a conversation is going is quite often measured by how comfortable you feel during a period of natural silence. If you sense awkwardness, then maybe you are not natural conversational partners. Having the confidence to remain quiet for a bit to allow people to gather their thoughts is part of the mastery.

15. The subject

Some people are great at sparking off a conversation, some struggle. I would ask shop staff, waitresses or anyone anywhere, whether they were enjoying themselves. It allows them to say anything they want and answer how they please. I found asking someone if they are busy can be plain irritating. It is either obvious or a signal they are not doing enough. "You have lost some weight" can be a huge compliment to some, but others take it as a suggestion that they are not looking after themselves. Telling someone that they look tired doesn't always go down well either. You find a question that suits your character and try it out or just say something really innocuous or worst of all make them listen to one of your many problems. Getting a conversation going is easier than getting out of an awkward spot. The psychology of not wanting to offend is powerful. In a hundred years time, a whole new set of people will be making the same mistakes so why worry about looking a fool at times if that is what is needed to improve your conversation skills.

We all have curiosity, but it is interested in different things. We like conversations that seem relevant to us. It is hard to stoke excitement from people that have no interest, no understanding

and little grounding in certain subjects. However, we can engage in dialogue that strays away from our normal preferred topics to fit in and be a part of a lot more conversations. It is tempting to brush off a wearisome subject. Some loath football but they can look for an angle that can be talked about to stay involved. I would ask why half of the population are barred from playing in the main leagues and ask for a guestimate as to when that will change.

Where are you from? What do you do for a living? Have you been here before? Et cetera. It can get monotonous especially after the fourth group you bump into reel these standard questions off. You have impeccable good sense to listen. You end up talking about a whole host of interesting things after but decide to take a different approach. Out go the chat up lines, in comes the discourse, non-anticipatable discourse. Statements, commentary, or maybe rhetorical questions that lead people to join in. "The birds wanted a tree there, so they fetched some seeds last year." Sometimes I have had to try several themes to get a bite, but it is worth it. There is less competition, less 'I have done more than you'. More a conversation of equals, where all of us enjoy the communication for communications sake and no hidden agenda.

Those that make great speeches spend a lot of time planning and rehearsing them. Maybe an hour or two practicing for a five minute speech.

16. The pinnacle

There are international conversation championships. The winners tend to be those that perpetually interrupt, never make eye contact or if they do it is an unnerving stare. They only talk about what interests them and add as much irrelevant detail as they can muster. They will even give you precise, complete, directions to get somewhere whether travelling by car or foot, rather than just say it is on the outskirts of Timbuktu. Go past the bridge, take the second, oh hang on, no the third left after the blue house, up the hill for a mile or so.... They will ask you a question and before you get a chance to answer they will resume their thoughts on how your life could be so much better were you to treasure their worldly wisdom. When you locate the tiniest pause and begin to speak, they turn away and look at something else or walk off completely. And the prize? They win the coveted peace – few continue to bother them.

It is not easy to swallow our pride and admit our mistakes, but we can be surprised at how supportive people are when we are open and honest. A strong person doesn't mind being wrong and can end up revelling in it over time. It is like being the main trunk of a tree holding up all the branches. You can do the exact opposite of

some of the things which are proposed in the power seekers armoury and be highly regarded.

People may not like taking advice but they sure as heck like giving it. We can use this as a way in. Not only are people keen to help but I have learnt a lot of shortcuts through asking people for assistance. Unless it is some trade secret, few will be hesitant to offer up words of encouragement and show you things. Friendships can be spawned by it. Likewise, rather than doing someone a favour, get someone to do a favour for you and they like you more, oddly. So long as it is not too much of a pain. Best when it is help that they feel pride in giving. This invokes a lot of what is said in power, control, and the desire to be need. With the desire to be needed the relevant aspect. Helping others gives us a sense of place, purpose, and relevance. A miserable sod doesn't want to be ignored by all and left to rot. They want you to go to them cap in hand, which demonstrates they are needed.

This chapter is a mere rant and would be best cut completely to lower the evangelism level. It has been left in for fun. Admitting that it is opinionated does not excuse it either, but diodes are so abundant. I spent far more time teaching children to read than I ever did teaching them to converse. That was a big mistake.

When yes, yes, yes doesn't work, when you can't get a word in, when they pay little regard to what you are saying, when they seem to live in their own little world, when they care far too much about themselves frustration sets in. Try as you might but change is rare. Do you explain the importance of your issue to your dog, your cat, or your chickens? If you are happy that your cat doesn't care, then you can be equally happy that many self-centred people won't care either.

Pretty people can be plagued by pests. Whilst most of us enjoy attention we might feel harried, we might feel jolly uncomfortable. Being unbelievably bad at conversation on purpose is the counter to these pests and unwanted advances. Never point out lies or inconsistencies. Neither agree nor disagree with what they are saying. Keep engagement close to zero. Appear non-vulnerable, by showing that you don't need any help. Perhaps mention important things you are managing tomorrow. Not just boring but being totally indifferent to the stranger next to you. Make up a half-truth that lets them keep their pride intact. If you resort to a bit of aggression, soften quickly afterwards.

Selling

As a consumer it is useful to know if you are being served well or are being influenced by clever sales techniques. As a salesman, knowing how to maximise sales can be revolutionary. The most enduring businesses offer things that they believe in.

The first rule of customer service is to acknowledge waiting customers as quickly as possible. The busier a business becomes, the more they become prone to complacency. I have seen it time and time again, lots of customers willing to part with their money but having to wait ages to be served. Some leave disgruntled, many feel less inclined to return there another time. Customers that are made to feel like lemons leave with a bitter taste. You can only serve one customer at a time, that is true. However, that does not provide an excuse for ignoring everyone in the queue. All it takes is a quick look at them and saying, "I'll be with you very soon, and then you after". People will wait ten times longer if their presence is acknowledged and their order in which they will be served is affirmed. Aim to acknowledge customers within 30 seconds of arriving at the counter and serve them within 2 minutes.

Some merchandisers display the price in big bold bright lettering, others place a small label that can only be found when a customer picks up the item to examine it. Many leave the price tag off completely. Lots of us walk away as soon as we find out the price. Curiosity comes into play, as always, keeping us interested to some extent - until we know the price. Salesmen do not want us to know the price until they have had a chance to explain all the merits of the item they are selling. People might think something sounds expensive until they comprehend the true value of an item. If an item is of standard fare like a common tin of beans, then you may put a bold price tag on as you are trying to convey the discount on offer. If your item of jewellery contains 24 carat gold a customer needs to know this, particularly if they are familiar with the cost of similar ones comprising 15 carat brass.

Items are seen marked as just 25.00 rather than £25/\$25/€25 as the currency symbol can be hard hitting. We can also limit our offerings to 2 per customer to make people believe that they are lucky to be able to buy some.

An item must meet a customer's needs. It is pointless talking about the price if it is not suitable. It doesn't matter how much discount you offer; people won't buy it if you haven't got the right size or colour they want. Establish that it fits their requirements first, then you can enter the price negotiation phase.

A good salesman does better staying quiet, listening rather boring a customer with sales patter. They pick up on what the customer wants and get to any reservations they may have. Only by listening, can you find ways of reassuring them that what you have on offer is good for them. Talking with the buyer about them, what they do, and their interests builds a degree of trust and obligation. You need to be genuine though. Asking a customer a few questions blithely will only project a false image.

Discounts

Once you offer a discount, people expect it every time. Discounting lowers your profit and diminishes the brand. Rather than discounting you can try offering something free with a purchase, something that costs next to nothing but has value to a customer. Restaurants could give out recipe cards to diners for example, rather than a free drink. Find something that will not lower the money taken at the till. Better presentation, better pictures of your products will make them seem much more appealing. A small amount of effort goes a long way. Items sent to auctions have fetched dramatically higher prices simply for being shown off in their best light.

When you have confidence in what you are providing, you avoid being a busy fool trading goods at pitifully low margins. Cheap cheap cheap is not everything. Some people do not mind paying more if what they are getting is good value. People often make choices based upon cost, but quality counts too. The advantage of having a better product though is wasted unless the customers are aware of the difference between what you are selling and that of the competition. Highlight the qualities and advantages of what you are promoting. Intelligent people reduce the price by 10 percent. Sales may go up, but to make the same profit they may have to sell 25 percent more. Clear stuff that is hanging around, absolutely, but remember turnover is easy without profit.

Poor cash flow and providing too much credit can undermine a good business. Some businesses pay full time staff to do nothing other than spend all day collecting monies owed to them. Some people will owe you money and won't buy for a while. They use other suppliers as they don't wish to settle the account. You can end up losing both the customer and the cash. Big businesses have been built on foundations of near zero credit. You may grow a little slower by refusing 30 days, 60 days accounts, but if your money runs out, your business is dead. Insisting on payment on delivery, even at slightly lower margins, is a wonderful formula.

Haggling

If someone offers 25 for an item priced at 30 many will try and get a compromise of say 27. This is not the only route available.

Instead, you propose 35. Some will find this amusing, others bafflement. You then try and seek to sell at somewhere around 32 but will accept the original price of 30. The point being that 25 is long forgotten and negotiation takes place in the number range that is above rather than below what you want. Making good eye contact with your customer shows that you are serious. If you look away when telling them the price you may be indicating that you are ashamed of the cost. Those that are the best at haggling do so in a light-hearted way. People are more likely to achieve price reductions when they smile and appear friendly than when cold and antagonistic.

When making an offer for something we can either put the item in question down, point out all the flaws and make the seller inclined to accept a low price. Or. Show the seller that you love the item, appreciate the care and attention that they have given it. Make them feel that it is going to a good home. I prefer the latter; it is a bit counter intuitive. Some people refuse to sell things even at a higher price if they take a dislike to you.

Making the sale

Why bother getting a customer interested if you are not prepared to close the deal? "Would you like one?" "Shall I put it in a bag for you?" "Was it two that you want, or just the one?" Some never learn the art of being a successful salesman. They are never bold enough to close the deal. Closing too early can be a problem but closing too late is usually the least productive. Being unafraid of closing the deal often beats technical knowledge. If the customer says they are not sure, you can carry on the conversation and ask again a few minutes later. If you are asked a question of a technical nature that you are unsure off. You can simply say, "I don't know but I'll find out for you", then go and find out. People are more inclined to purchase from someone who makes the effort and get the facts right. Incidentally many salesmen can over sell if they try to overload the customer with too much information. Instead of closing they pile on even more information that hinders not helps get a sale.

People are usually reassured if they know that others use the service or buy the products that you are offering. "John Smith buys these regularly from us and is always pleased." Crowded stalls arouse curiosity – people want to know what is going on. A herd mentality prevails, and people don't want to miss out when they see other people part with their money. There are tipping points at restaurants where if it looks busy enough it must be good. Nice young ladies are often used to get people inside. They are used wrong. Instead of hassling customers on the streets they could be used to talk and interact with the customers inside. People like to be listened to. These ladies need only do that, listen

to what the holiday makers have been doing all day and soon the place will be full.

Inexperienced traders like the feeling of being all powerful. They can get you anything you want. Except they can't. Or they don't have the time. They say yes. They learn over time to say no instead. Customers ask us for things we don't have. I would always say to them that I make some enquires and get back to them, making it clear that it is not a certainty at all. That way I avoid a lot of stress. Saying no sorry, is hard at first. We can be too quick saying yes. This applies in other walks of life too. If you think you are unlikely to make it their party, tell them that and you will be respected far more than if you let them down.

If there is something missing, it is best to know so before you buy it. If you knew beforehand, then all is fine, we are happy. If we discover afterwards then we want our money back. The product may do everything we want, the feature in question may not be something we ever use but we were told in the shop that that feature was on the product. People will accept an item that is a little damaged so long as it is pointed out before they buy. Get the facts right. Tell the truth. People will return things on principle even though the item is excellent value.

Cornering

One aspect of the hard sell; formulate all the questions in such a way that the customer will say yes over and over. No is an objection, yes is an agreement. Provide options rather than opt outs; "I'll come over to show you this product. Which day is better, Thursday or Friday?" rather than, "When would you like me to come over?" If they are busy on those two days, offer another day. Some customers need a little push to overcome their wariness. Don't be afraid to give people some encouragement if what you are selling is good for them. However, shopping ought to be a joy rather than a dreaded gauntlet avoiding overly pushy types. Tricks are deployed to get information out of people. Asking someone their age is awkward but a necessary requirement for some selling schemes. "What is your age? I'm 24" is what they will ask, giving theirs to soften the impact. My response would be "good for you sweetheart".

Salesmen want you to buy there and then so will wear you down to the point where you say anything to end the nightmare. They will keep telling you things, giving you more and more facts and figures until decision fatigue sets in. You might regret buying something simply because of that decision fatigue. We can only take in so much information in one go. Politicians suffer decision fatigue too, resulting in lots of poor policy choices.

Some people want to prove to the salesman that they can afford it and prove that they are worthy of it. Instead of just walking away they have sympathy where none is really deserved. Some feel that they have an obligation to buy. If you are not sure, just leave, use some flattery, and show gratitude for their time and go away to have a proper think about it. Any real deal will be there tomorrow. Walking away gets easier the more you do it. Wipe it from your mind like car windscreen wipers swipe rain aside.

The story goes something like this. A man is invited into someone's house for a drink. Rather than decline and cause offence they enter the house. Shortly after been given the said drink they are killed, cut into manageable pieces, and dumped in the river. The fear of causing offence overrides the concern for our personal safety. I didn't want a drink of tea they kindly brought to me as a sweetener to buy a wretched carpet. I only wanted some information. It is surprising how quickly you can get drawn into wretched situations. The causing offence part sticks in our mind for years. Nevertheless, it is a battle of psychology that you can win. Be super polite. Show lots of appreciation whilst also declining their false kindness. Say no nicely.

Some won't let you examine an item for long. They take it from you like a parent taking a toy off a child. They then walk slowly backwards, looking at you. I know the stunt so let them keep it. Rude waiters get more tips than pleasant ones because we want to prove something, to kind of show them. I leave a pile of the lowest denomination coins and make a hasty exit. If a tip is added to the bill automatically, I scrub it off and give them nothing. I hate tipping when it is seemingly mandatory. I liken it to a form of corruption. Onboard a ferry travelling across to an island I made my way to the dinner hall. I approached the order taker who made an assumption, albeit a correct one, that I couldn't speak the local language too well. He blanked me completely. A much nicer person came over shortly after and we played a game of pick three at random. After the rather fine meal I forced a tip on this hospitable person. It was probably more than a day's wages. I did so because of their willingness to engage.

Great businesses need great staff. They need to sell great products, but customers play a vital role too. Customer feedback helps the business owners improve what they are doing. By giving tips where warranted and commending not just criticising the offerings, establishments evolve and flourish. They won't know what they are doing wrong unless you tell them. They won't keep doing what they are doing well unless you applaud them.

The genuine article

What is real and what is fake and how much does it matter? There are two sides to the coin of the con. On the one side there are

those selling what they purport to be the genuine real thing and do so at a premium. On the other side there are those living off the backs of the creative and providing a similar item for a significant discount in relation to the 'real' thing. There is a thing called provenance where something is supposedly worth more, not because it has any superior qualities but because it has been owned by someone well known in the past. People are paying for abstract thin air, but it keeps them very happy. It also provides reassurance that they will be able to sell it on again - by duping someone else at a later date if so desired.

Deception is everywhere. If you have a swanky set of clothes, a flash car and showy jewellery you may be either trying to obtain money for a business venture or you are trying to lure someone to lie on their back for a lay. You are hoping that by portraying yourself as smart, assured, and secure can nail the deal or demonstrate your marriage potential whatever the case may be. It doesn't make one jot of difference if the clothes are from the local market, the car on hire and the necklace is plated, the illusion works if you get what you want. Underdogs are loud. They need to be to have a chance.

Parts are made to a certain specification so that they perform well under load, at high temperatures and pressures. They cost a lot to make because of the large amount of work involved producing them. If someone passes off a substandard part with a bogus certificate of conformity and it fails in flight the culprits are culpable for an invidious malfeasance. Likewise selling counterfeit medicines that make people ill rather than make them better is contemptible. However, we can sell things for a premium that do not take significantly longer to manufacture. They may use better materials and are usually a little more durable. Nevertheless, the extra cost of producing these items never justifies the vastly higher price. As a double whammy we pay more for an item because it bears a fashionable emblem. That emblem is an advert. We pay a premium to become a walking advertisement for a company that dupes us into believing. A famous person would be given the item for free and paid to showcase it. How much are you paying rather than have been paid to have these emblems adorning your body? They trick you by building a belief in officialdom. Government officials and police officials may indeed hold sway over official business, but a so-called official vendor is a marketing ploy. It is an extension to branding that makes us believe that all else is unworthy, seducing us to pay over the odds for things.

Money

Some children who are careful with their limited pocket money decide to get an ice cream. They join the queue and wait patiently for their turn to be served. One of them drops theirs on the floor and is swindled by fate.

Are you interested in making money, big money? I am going to give you a list of reasons why you won't succeed, and it won't have anything to do with luck, or the fact that you have come from a deprived family. The most offensive comment some monkeys make about the well-off is to say they were lucky. Lucky that they had to study instead of enjoying lots of nights out on the town. Lucky to endure a long period of time earning very little. A doctor could spend seven years studying and then years learning the ropes on the job before getting a salary to compensate. Good fortune, serendipity and hustler's luck mentioned in the Laura section may come into it, but luck no, not really. You may get lucky with your third attempt, your third business. Some will strike lucky first time, but very few will get their first business to work well enough to become rich. Most fail, fail again, and again before they hit on something good and get the formula right. I see it like throwing dice. You want a six but are unlikely to get that six first time. However, each time you throw it, it gets easier because the dice changes. The lower numbers get removed and replaced by bigger ones in effect because of what you have learnt.

If you anticipate life as a businessman is going to be wonderful, think again. It can be good, but for most it is a long hard grind. You like flowers and have dreams of spending all day arranging them. You think about all the people that will come to get bouquets for birthdays and celebrations. Hence, you set up a florist. However, the reality kicks in when you spend most of your time dealing with complaints, miss-deliveries, fraud, theft, tax accounting, administration, advertising and getting technology to work as desired. The actual amount of time you have, to be hands on with the flowers themselves gets less and less to the point of zero if the company gets large. The headaches and levels of commitment reached are near impossible to envisage until you are in the thick of it. Some wonder why they went down that path when they could have had a sheltered life working for someone else.

Sacrifice, sacrifice and more sacrifice is the only way. Not much time for the kids, partner or meddling with the décor of your house. Forget about working 9 to 5. You are unlikely to get anywhere unless you work 9 to 5 and evenings and weekends for a good few years. Lots use their evenings and weekends to build

a business, proving that it is viable before resigning from their stable day job. I semi-retired quite early so there was a payoff for all those years of commitment. The stress takes a toll though. Stress makes you ill. Believe me it can make you unwell in peculiar ways. In the long run it is worth it, and money gives you choices and freedoms like nothing else. Happiness though will evade you if you believe that money is everything. It is not.

Most are unwilling to put in the hard work and sacrifice needed to become rich. In a way that is useful to those that want more. If everyone were rich, nobody would be rich. Wealth is relative. If a taxi driver who used to charge 20 for a typical trip came into a fortune and had millions in the bank, I doubt they would continue to charge the same amount. If they, like everyone, else was equally rich, they would raise the fares to 2000 to make it worthwhile. If we all had piles of money, then we would want more for our services. Although some might continue to drive for the fun of it, most would either sit back and relax or explore other non-money-making adventures. It only counts if you have more and can therefore afford to offload all the menial jobs to others who are willing to be paid comparatively small sums.

Reason two for your failure will be none other than hiding from the truth. You will not examine your profitability properly. You will do anything but examine the numbers. Some of the things you sell will be making a loss when all costs are taken into account. Some things you think are worth doing aren't. Whilst you are selling something for 40 and making 2 you could have been using that time to sell something else for 40 and make 6. If you offer a good service that people want, profits will follow. That is for sure, but no one can keep losing *ad infinitum*. I found myself reevaluating what I was doing. I was absorbed by mending and selling small clocks for 5. Lots of them. Then it dawned on me that I could mend items worth 50 in the same time as that of the cheap clocks. The scale of profits was so different. I could make 10 per item rather than 2. Whether it is low margin – high volume or a small number of sales but huge margin, those that succeed scrutinise what they are doing.

So not only will you cower from the commitment, ignore the reality, and refuse to close a futile business or morph it into something else, but you will be one of those that will talk it to death and do very little. We must shift from endless talk into endless action. It is much better to have some negative input and continue despite it. You will have people advising against your scheme. That is not a bad thing. It can be worse having lots say it is a good idea and not point out the problems. Either way, get on with it.

There is only one rule in business; get others to do the hard work.

Delegate. Many do well, but not really well. They fail to get others making money for them. Your workers will do things a little different to you and you will find that unacceptable. It does not matter if they are a bit slower. So long as they get the job done and they make you money that is fine. Micromanage at your peril. I put as many things in place as possible to ensure workers could not make mistakes. However, tolerance and a degree of flexibility is paramount. They do the overwhelming amount of the graft, whilst you deliver the tiny but vital craft. Many of us are good craftsmen but deny being ropey managers. Workers need a small amount of money and lots of credit and praise. You are not there to be liked. Your workers are not your friends. Remember as said in the section Children, we like the strict teachers the most. Even adults need boundaries. Get that right and a good working relationship will come about.

Clear hierarchies work best, always. A collaboration with like-minded people who all share the profits can be appealing. It works for some. However, you need to contend with a lot of politics and find people that are as self-motivated as you. That is not easy in every industry. The self-righteous rarely, in fact they never admit that some in the supply chain are exploited. Maybe those in the same nation get a reasonable deal, but those abroad don't count. We find an excuse to pay someone a few miles away across the border half what we pay those hundreds of miles away in the same country. Somewhere along the line, some group won't feel the same level of benefits that your success brings you.

Going without, then going without some more. This will separate the donkeys from the racehorses. Your partner wants the kitchen renovated and four holidays a year. In time you can have that, but beforehand money is king. Money makes money, new furniture does not. I liken it to a farmer. She plants a tree and waits for it to fruit. Then she sells the fruit. She spends the proceeds. Her neighbour plants more trees instead. Her neighbour ends up with so much fruit she has no idea what to do with it. What we go without today comes back tenfold in time. It is not complicated. You don't need to be a wizard who invents something. We can simply find a market and operate in it. Maybe we can do it better, do it in a better location or just be more diligent.

To summarise, think of what service/business/product you are going to offer. Put a plan in place. Implement it. It is nothing more than that. The plan will invariably overestimate the number of sales and underestimate the hidden costs. The plan will probably aim too low. If you aim to make 1,000,000 and make half that, that it is better than aiming to make 100,000 and making half of that. Has the plan considered the realistic maximum potential?

Can it be expanded? Can you use the power of duplication? Are you just messing about?

Those that end up wealthy have a different mentality to the peasants. Even the poorest of the poor could save a small percentage of what they receive to gradually build an investment pot. However, the attraction of spending what they have for the needs of today overrides the potential for longer-term prosperity.

One might question what all the work is for though, if you end up too old and worn out to enjoy it. Unless you truly get more pleasure from work than play then you could be fooling yourself. When on the entrepreneurial road we are investing in the future. However, a good few become blighted by too great a workload. Some are not able to resist that extra deal, to make even more money which may be surplus to requirement in hindsight.

Tipping the scales

If you want to be rich, then mix and mingle with the rich. Leave the losers to their own devices. Your mentality changes when you are in the company of those that succeed. It is hard to lift yourself up when around those that do nothing but fail.

I grew my business organically, by that I mean reinvesting the proceeds and gradually expanding. I rarely borrowed and have kept largely out of debt the whole time. If you can understand this most simple concept, then you have a chance; You need to have more money coming in than going out. Add up what you are spending and see if your wealth is on an upward trajectory. Some think they are successful well before they have built up a decent cash pile. Keen to impress they get an oversized office and kit it out beautifully. Such businesses have the same mentality as a firework, bright and exuberant but short lived.

I spent a good while looking at various options for making money. Each time I became surprised as how well others were already doing these things that I had thought about. I became equally surprised by how low their prices were. As more and more compete, it gets ever harder. It is no mean feat to find a way in, a gap in the market with potential to profit from. Some of the duller, less inspiring types of trade can be as fruitful as trying to come up with something new. A small improvement, better service, more convenience, simplicity, a something can give you an edge. You have no need to dominate, just take a market share.

Peasants and disparity

Is it fair that someone earns more than someone else? If you work for twice as long, many expect double the pay. If doing piece work, are you to be paid by the amount you get done or is it not fairer to split everything between all those involved.

Should a talented individual get the same remuneration as those that support them? Does the lead singer in a band deserve a greater share than the backing singers and musicians? It is always going to be unfair if you are born with an ability or disability. Can tax go some way towards reducing the disparity, redressing the gains made through efficiency and good fortune? Do we address every loophole that people find to carve out a bigger slice? There are trade-offs. Wealth with time and freedom. Wealth with pressure and responsibility. Work and leisure, leisurely pace. The answers to these questions lie with our fixed preferences. Some prefer the idea of handling their own affairs. Others like to see the government take greater responsibility for how wealth is distributed. Whatever system is in place within any society, you will always have a hard-core bulk of individuals who will have a low economic peasant status, relative to a minor few who will have significantly more.

Peasants prefer to minimise responsibility. They want to take less risks and like a clear separation between work and home time. Thankfully for the wealthy there are plenty of these people about that are prepared to put in all this essential work. Businesses are not all heartless organisations that want it all. They have a habit of providing rather good goods and services that people flock to for their outstanding value for money.

The rich do not get rich singlehandedly, for they require the efforts of hundreds if not thousands of others to do all the arduous work. The idea, good or bad, is to cream off a premium on each hour an employee works. The employer has considerable costs to cater for but will always pay less than what an employee generates. They will need to if they are to continue for any length of time. As a business grows it can take advantage of economies of scale and the power of duplication. They can take on extra staff taking more and more slices up to the point of saturation. They are however prone to rest on their laurels and will sooner or later trip and fail. As fashions change and new industries emerge some business no matter how large will go into decline.

Each individual will play a part in a society. At first sight some roles appear less significant than others. However, each contributor to an economy enables doctors, the police, teachers and so on to be paid. Even where the contribution seems small and the tax paid negligible, the work done has an input. Division of labour enables more to get done. A surgeon can't operate safely if the theatre is not cleaned. A cleaner might be viewed as a lowly individual but performs a vital function. If the surgeons had to clean, then that time would not be spent carrying out clinical procedures.

There are two common errors that people may fail to recognise; one is that someone with more is a more valued person, which

ignores the truth that everyone holds equal validity. The other is that lots have other things in their life that they consider more important to them. An ordinary looking peasant that you might see going about their daily business might appear to be leading a dull and uninspiring way of life. What you might not see is that away from view they can be carrying out some rather daring and interesting activities. The mistake is to assume that what you are doing and the manner you deal with things is equally captivating for others. People can be said to approach things differently rather than better than others. Just having an income that is enough to provide for ourselves and the family is in itself very gratifying. It is so much more rewarding and less stressful than sponging off others and being a parasite. Work after all can provide much more than just cash in the hand at the end of the week. Work may not necessarily define us, but every bird, bat, and bee, beavers away to build their lives.

Few of us really want great wealth. Hardly any make real effort or find the perseverance needed for betterment. Becoming rich remains a fantasy for the bulk of the population. Playing a lottery keeps the hope alive and steers you clear of all the hard work. There are advantages of being out of the rich man's journey so long as you are not miss sold the fear of missing the boat.

Upon reaching a point where money is flowing in rather nicely, you come to spend it, but find that having ample cash is not the possession of a magic wand. Where before you wished you could afford many things, now you wish people will get what you want done when you want it and to a standard you crave. You place an order and have to wait. You want an extension to your house and that means a long period of inconvenience as the building work is carried out. Move out for a few months, but when you return to inspect it, so much is below par and far removed from your hopes and instructions. Any new toy requires more learning and familiarisation. Money is an aid, but only removes some of life's frustrations. It is not the sole elixir nor a cure-all in life.

Value

We know about saving, spending, and lending money, but what is this ethereal imaginary thing called money? It brings out the worst and best in people. It is surprising how little we need to offer, to get someone to report the whereabouts of a wanted individual. A third of a weekly wage will do it nicely. That is enough to override the concerns for the welfare of the one being sought. Money is abstract and can be created and deflated on a whim. Confidence is everything when it comes to money, businesses, and investments. How much reliance and trust we are prepared to place on the issuer of the notes, shares, and bonds. Many businesses have failed not because a lack of expected profit

or because they are going through a period of poor trading, but simply because confidence in them and the management has evaporated. People can get spooked and want out, so they withdraw credit and refuse further loans. Weaker businesses have survived worse storms in more dire circumstances as people have kept their faith in the organisation.

A forger produces a note. It goes into circulation then ends up being replaced by the central bank. Most notes get replaced at some point when they get torn and crumble apart. Where does the money come from? Unless someone gets stung and stuck with it the forger steals from every holder of the currency. Each unit of money is then worth a tiny bit less. Each pound, dollar, shilling is a small slice of a defined set amount of the cake. Printing more causes prices to rise to compensate.

How do you store money in a crisis? Gold's value fluctuates, shares can all but disappear and various commodities have a limited shelf life. Cash can get quickly devalued and it is near impossible to store large sums once the system collapses. A mixed basket is an option.

How do you prove you are you? Imagine if there was a key set of people who colluded and deny any knowledge of you. Your name maybe on the property deeds and attributed to a bank account, but they could argue that you are not the Fred Bloggs on the title, as it is owned by another Fred Bloggs. Our identity is based upon people accepting and vouching for who we are. Even some genetic fingerprint can be denied as purportedly been that of your twin. How do you prove you have no twin when records have been changed?

Magic money

It is remarkable how you can steal from the stupid via scams, pyramid selling schemes etc. There will always be naïve individuals who haven't encountered every available scam. The adage, there is one born every minute, is very real indeed as more people turn adult each day. A scammer makes us feel that if we don't join them, we will miss a once in a lifetime opportunity that gets us eternal prosperity. You do not need a good product, you do not need a worthwhile service, all you require is something consumable, an everyday item that many people use. The money is not made through the distribution of the item as that is merely a distraction. The main wealth is gained by collecting large joining fees from the new members of the network. The fools join the pyramids whereas *the clever ones start them*.

I recall one instance where there was a 'women's empowerment opportunity'. People would chuck in a fair wedge and have their name added to a list. The husbands joined in too, in their droves,

by sneakily using their wives' name. Once some 15 or so have been snared, then you get to start your own list. "Why or why don't you just start a list off yourself?", I tell them. "Oh, that is not allowed". "What? they started that one you clown."

Capitalism

Consumerism is akin to a fisherman dangling a tempting delight to snare the hungry. If you can't force people to buy your product and there is little in the way of government support to buy your output, you need to induce people to buy your wares. You can make people feel left out if they don't buy certain things. If you make your products or services fashionable, you entice the gullible. Even better use the third person, preferably a famous individual to make people want to aspire to those that appear admirable and 'happening'.

Capitalism can be confused with financial engineering. Trading a financial product is not the same as using money to increase productivity. You may invest in a machine that will speed up your work. This can increase your sales or reduce your costs. The increase in profits cover the cost of the finance involved in purchasing it. Another elementary example of good capitalism is to lend to a market trader. With the extra funds, they can buy more stock. The more stock they have the more they will sell each day.

The main point of this good capitalism is that people get the original money back and make some extra as well. Bad capitalism is where one provides the means for someone to obtain a new sofa. The added interest will mean they pay a whole lot more for it, which is bad enough. Worse still after a few years of lounging on it, it will end up being dumped. Both the interest and the cost of the sofa is never recouped. The person begins to spend their future earnings and is kept much poorer as a result. Lending is good for all people concerned if and only if there is profit potential. After all, an old person for example may not be able to work anymore but can earn a little by lending to those that can. Profiting from lending is not bad as it is the ultimate in cooperation as all parties can gain. Capitalism is sweet when used to increase profitability rather than profligacy.

Selling fresh air to one another is not capitalism. Turning a piece of metal into a fork adds value to the metal. Branding the spoon 'super deluxe spoon by Sir Stewart' gives it a certificate of trust and thus can be sold for more. People will pay more per item for a small quantity – distribution, wholesale to retail. These are essential elements of an economy. When you sell a duff financial instrument to the unwary you are not creating economic value. Someone gains 10 at the expense of someone losing 10.

Imagine you are sitting around a camp fire and one bright spark has a great idea. Let's make a set of bellows to blow lots of air into the fire. It will burn much better. When they try it, it works, and the fire gets a lot hotter. They fall asleep and die of hypothermia. Why, because the wood burns much quicker. The only way to have more sustainable heat is to go into the woods, cut, chop, and fetch some more wood. A government can go into the bank and change the money in their account from 50 to 500 by adding a zero. They have made money. This will act like blowing air on the fire and the economy will heat up somewhat. However, a farmer may have 50 pigs in their sty, but can't turn them into 500 by adding a zero. Wealth is created when we grow something. Mine something. When we transform something; metal into cutlery.

Buy now die later

If you want to feed the rich, buy everything on credit. Never save for anything. Hand over the largest portion possible of your wages coming in by way of interest on loans. Keep the bankers fat. You can't just sit on the floor for a few months, and you certainly can't be seen with a second-hand table, it must be new and nice looking. You must keep up the appearance that you are managing just fine and hide the ever-increasing debt charges from everyone. We must have things now; waiting is for the stupid. Never invest in draught proofing or energy efficient devices as they will lower your bills. Sacrificing a little today to make large gains months down the line is daft. After all we can just moan and groan that those bankers and the government are not generous enough. Always ensure that the children of yours have it right away. Buying one now and paying interest on the loan for it is much better than buying them one cleanly from what you would have spent on the finance cost alone next year. After all the bankers have a much bigger house to maintain than you, more cars and luxury holidays to pay for. You must keep them smiling at your stupidity.

People want something, so they pawn an item and get loaned 100. A month goes by, and they have to pay 130 to have the item back. Not having 130 they just pay 30. The same thing happens the month after. Now they are 60 down. The situation doesn't improve. They pay a further 30. People have managed to find 90 for the interest but couldn't do without that 100 back at the beginning. Throughout their life this will have been just one of many instances of this kind of thing. Maybe we are not in their shoes with all the pressures of 'poverty', but by calling a halt to all this silliness for a few months they would never need borrow ever again. There is no sense of being smug and being pleased with oneself for steering clear of debt. Those that managed to

avoid borrowing (except for a mortgage on a house) realise that no amount of assistance handed out will make any difference unless debt addicts gain some self-control.

Is it all fixed?

When you consider how much something costs to make and try to factor in the price of all the material, labour and transport you begin to realise that it is all arbitrary. If you dig out the raw materials from the ground the earth doesn't charge anything. All costs are derived from labour charges, taxes, and land lease expenses. It is all based on paying someone an amount for their role. There is no underlying cost just an amount someone charges. Somewhere along the line there is a baseline figure that is used to set all the relative prices.

Even though there is the supply and demand balancing system, we find that one person is getting anything from 10 to 100 times as much for the exact same article of work. Something like a haircut can take the same amount of time and use equal skill, but the price charged in different locations is miles apart. To justify it by taking the property prices and local costs of living does not make it fit. Clever economic practices are used to maintain the disparity. I said the exact same haircut, not a better one, nicer or more stylish. Same hands same result just a different price. These things do not continue in this way forever. Slowly but surely, there is an equalisation, dragging those that had an easy ride for a long time downwards, and lifting the rest up.

Pride and professionalism

Even a caveman would be more likely to thrive and survive if they make their spears straighter, stronger, and sharper. A professional can stand back and look at their work and see where there is any room for improvement. Make no mistake about it, the quality of work counts a lot. You can only expand a business by offering a decent service. By sorting all complaints along the way, addressing the issues to avoid the same problems reoccurring, you can be sure that profits follow. There will be exceptions, those that do hit and run sales or flog dead horses, but few manage to make a large business that stands the test of time by ripping people off. Besides there is no better feeling than doing something well. You are not always trying to avoid irate people seeking recourse. As a customer, it is better to pay after the job is done, never beforehand. As a service provider, a good bit of incentive is lost once you have the payment.

More orders coming your way is great. More people wanting to use your service is great. What is not so great is that there will be a greater number of problems to sort out. Customers are not always right, but problems will need to be dealt with if you want

to avoid them stacking up and causing stress. For each issue that pops up, just deal with it. Either refund, replace or sort an alternative un-emotively. I say again, just deal with it there and then. The minute you get wound up by trying to see who is right and who is wrong the joy of trading dwindles. Some customers are outright thieves and expect you to take a loss, however most are not. Most businesses find that on balance the over whelming majority of customers give you more help than hindrance, but the odd painful ones stick out because of the way our mind works. To the customer it is 20, to you it is 3 profit, so you need to sell another 7 items to get back in the black from one issue. Going on a 2 percent standard failure/return rate which is typical for a wide range of businesses you will always lose 40 in each 2000 of turnover and losing 40 in 294 of profit is acceptable. If you get a 10 percent failure rate your profit is down to 70 which is unlikely to cover overheads.

You can do a jigsaw puzzle in many ways. You might locate the corners first then do all the edges. Some might see a bunch of one colour and quickly put together an island of pieces. Some things will need forward planning and must not be overlooked to avoid creating delays further down the line. Too many find a stumbling block and put the whole project on hold when it could have been resolved eventually one way or another. It would be ideal to start selling when your product is perfect, and you have the full range on offer. The problem is that it is not until you begin selling that you find out what the issues are that lay ahead. One may want to be careful about over marketing a new un-established item, as you don't want to have widespread knowledge of a product with problems. In most cases, it is better to just get going and start shifting the stock you have and make incremental improvements along the way.

Certified

To make a fair fortune we need a few things. An ability to work, a mechanism to work on and control over distractions. You can't make much money if the project can't be scaled up and expanded. If you choose hairdressing, then you could potentially open a salon in every town in the country. The mechanism is the thing that you setup and then duplicate over and over. Alternatively, you can get involved with something that can be manufactured in ever increasing quantities. In my business, I overestimated by a factor of ten the amount I would sell. Fortunately, I had selected a field where the range could be expanded tremendously.

Time and speed are everything in business, it is so easy to go backwards financially as rent, rates, vehicle costs and deductions taken for living expenses keep rolling in regardless. There is a big

difference between being able to do something as a hobby and being able to do it viably on a commercial basis. Having said that, we can still do impressive things in life if we ignore the time pressure. Perseverance is a vital key to business growth. You try one way and if that doesn't work you try another way, if that fails then try something else. Sometimes you just have to keep on going until the objective is met.

Anyone can build a wall even a sprightly eighty-year-old but being able to pick up six bricks at a time rather than just one is going to affect the time taken to complete it. As a leisure activity, there are no real-time constraints. Even if it all goes wrong you could demolish it and start it all over again until you are satisfied with the result.

Flying an aeroplane however is a different proposition altogether. You can spend as long as you like checking the aircraft and taxiing to the runway, but you need good reaction times to handle the plane during take-off, landing and all activities during the flight. This ability to respond to the events unfolding is the 'real time' factor and some may possess the skill, whilst others, regardless of the amount of practice may never meet the requirements to do it safely. It is not only pilots that have an ability to respond well in real time. Actors, comedians, and musicians are other examples of people with highly developed interactive skills. We have to accept our limitations when speed is an issue. However, for many jobs with enough grit and determination, where time is not a huge factor, we can accomplish all kind of things without needing a certificate or approval from others.

As for motivation? How do we garner the perseverance to succeed you may wonder. Perhaps you could visualise your goal. Think long and hard, day after day, dwelling on the bounty that is to come. And then by magic it materialises. This is a theorem that contains some truth and some fiction. If you keep thinking about your objectives, you place them higher up on your list of priorities. The more you visualise what you want, the more you want it. Effort will be needed though. You must examine the hurdles, break them down into smaller pieces and step forth.

A world without criminality

Considering a world free of crime is not about being idealistic nor espousing a utopian vision. It is more a reflection on the cost to society. Look at all the human endeavour spent countering criminality, protecting against it, and dealing with the aftermath. One third of all our efforts is in some way connected to criminality. It is a credible figure depending upon the culture in place. The police and maybe the army are at the forefront, but everyone spends a lot contending with it directly. We have passwords, encryption, locks on the door and immobilisers on the

car. Roller shutters, burglar alarms, video cameras and anti-climb paint. Software protection, fencing, safes, vaults, screens and so the list goes on. All the dishonesty that creates mountains of extra paperwork. All the time proving who you are and that you are not a security threat. Then we have prisons, court cases, thefts and muggings, fraud to deal with and pay for. Even lights left on to make it look like someone is at home. Do not think that scores of people would be without a job if there were no crime. Instead, these people could be deployed doing many other things and we would all be much richer. From filling in potholes to research and development, countless things that are not being done could be addressed rather than battling crime. We can either see it as a way of life and just how it is, or we can fight to end such insanity. Cutting spending on policing and prisons might seem like a good way to save money, but the tax revenue losses are larger than the savings made. Businesses reclaim tax on things that are stolen. They pay less tax as their profits are so much lower.

It is quite rare for someone to steal something because they are without food. Most theft is to satisfy greed. The irony is that people break the rules within society, but still expect the rest in that society to treat them with similar respect as everyone else when spending the ill-gotten gains. If they broke into a bank and took a hoard of money, they are relying upon the society to honour the stolen cash.

Clever criminals soon discover that breaking into someone's house is nowhere near as effective as theft by invoice. If you overcharge the vulnerable or the ill-informed you can get away with a lot more money knowing full well that the penalties are typically much lower. It is not too difficult to set up a business of some sort and start ripping people off. You don't need to use violence to clear out people's bank accounts, all you require is the audacity and the ability to disregard any guilt that comes after.

Every act of dishonesty makes the world a shittier place to live. If a bank overpays, we can hand it back. If a shop undercharges by mistake, we are free to point it out. When the money is reconciled, there will be a shortfall and some poor humble worker will either have their wages docked or get a warning. I recall a tale of the train guard: Passengers would leave items on the train and the guard would pick them up and take them home. "How can someone leave something on the train is beyond me, sometimes they come on with two suitcases and get off with one." Some years later the guard became absent minded as well and forgot to lock the door of the guard's room. As a result, someone tried the handle and woe and behold went in and took the wallet that was left in there. How can you be so stupid as to not lock the door! All the cards had to be cancelled, the cash lost, and the

sentimental wallet given as a gift was gone. Some may call this karma, pay back even. We all are absent minded at times, and it is sad that there are so many vultures out there ready to take advantage. We may live in big cities, but we can have the same atmosphere as the relaxed little islands that we go on holiday to. Good will is contagious.

Cloth dealers have been known to use a long ruler to buy and a short one to sell. Scams of one sort or another have been around for millennia. We become subjected to new types all the time and become adept at avoiding them. It is a mistake to think you will always spot them and not get swindled. Would you like to have your shed treated with preservative for just a small extra fee? Why not when all such garden furniture is made from pre-treated wood anyway. I wrote 20 on a piece of paper before we set off in a taxi to then be charged 40 on arrival. 20 each my friend. We don't like being duped as it makes a fool of our ego. Principle vs the crafty plays, playing out in the game of life. Sometimes it is an insignificant amount we lose and occasionally it is very detrimental to our financial wellbeing. Either way we still get a horrible sense of our own failings, what we did wrong and question how we could be so stupid. Once you enter the realm of trusting no one, you find things harder for you than the con artists. They move on to other prey; you are stuck with a form of grief. Delaying your actions can stem the flow. The trickster will make it seem vital that an action is done quickly when few things in life need be carried out right there and then. Very few worthwhile offers will be unavailable tomorrow or the day after.

Will we always consider curtailing crime like trying to stop it raining? We just get used to it and maybe find an umbrella to shield us from the worst of it. Where do you draw the line? Some see stealing from an old person as wrong but would take from a big business with little guilt. The big business is often owned by lots of small people via pension funds and saving schemes. Each crime means they pay out less to those in the position of being the least able to work now. Those working there on low pay have greater job insecurity and less bonuses.

To say that copying something such as media or software is not theft as the original has not been removed is farcical. Let me copy all your private pictures and show them to who I like. You still have the pictures; nothing will be lost. Taking without permission is theft. To paint a picture and present it as a work of someone renowned is adding to the output of a nation in the same way as a farmer grows vegetables. Those that own pictures of the same artist find that their works are now not quite so rare. Rarity is scarcity not a measure of value, it becomes subject to the whims and capriciousness of supply and demand. As we well know,

something is only worth what someone is prepared to pay for it. Authenticity is something in keeping with a tradition theme, in a personal sense it is being true to your identity and roots.

Dodge a bit of tax, who will really notice? The heavier the tax the more we might feel that we have paid enough already, and a little wheeze/fiddle is not that bad. When the wealth distribution seems unfair it creates an ill feeling with those left behind. Consequently, we feel more comfortable doing back hand deals and the black economy gets bigger. We acquire a principle of fair game. We fashion our own set of morals and never accept somethings as being too wrong. All animals are born to misbehave to some extent and continue misbehaving for as long as they can get away with it.

Those trudging on, content with their lot, will be pleased to see criminals having a hard time dealing with the stress, uncertainty and looking over their shoulder all the time. Most end up earning less than the hype would suggest. Only those at the top of the crime pyramid do well, but that is compensated by having plenty eager to take them out. The real attraction is often the feeling of power. Getting people to respect their wishes by controlling and commanding them about.

Increased wealth does have a few drawbacks that some may not appreciate. The more you have, the more you may have to worry about. Bigger houses have more rooms to clean, more cars add to the hassle of maintenance and employing lots of housekeepers becomes a job in itself. There is a freedom in poverty as there are options with wealth. It is not a freedom to buy whatever is needed or a freedom to afford to travel where and when you want, but a freedom from responsibility. Tell that to someone without much and they may laugh, but after explaining how much time you spend keeping on top of things, they may understand it is not as perfect as it might seem.

Whilst stacks of money in the bank provides a security blanket it all can seem pretty insignificant when real tragedies occur to us or our family. Quite often money will be to no avail when one's health deteriorates. Some problems can't be solved by throwing money at them, but those that can need little mulling over. People tend to just spend it and be done with it. Concerning themselves with more pressing things. Hence why saving a small percentage of your income can be so powerful. Save enough to get you out of trouble when needed, but not so much that it impinges on your present day-to-day life now. No other animal has the mechanism to store even a tiny fraction of what they forage to be used years later, like we can. You can save 2, 3, 4 percent and still live a great life now. You can sleep at night knowing that if a real calamity arises you can pay towards what is

needed without having to go cap in hand to other people. Telling people what they should do is the ultimate no-no, however. They say time is money, but money put aside can give you time, time to sort many a situation out.

Whatever you build or create or collect or hoard you are only a temporary custodian. We are owners of many things, things that are left behind when we go. Wealth, fantastic family life, a beautiful partner, time, health - you judge for yourself what you would swap. As for me? I found myself far more interested in going to an inner-city skateboarding park than finding ways to accumulate more wealth. It was supposed to be for zooming about on wheels, but we were zooming about hand in hand dancing. And this is what philosophy is about. Working out what it is all for, for us individually. Some things money can't buy, but if I hadn't got the money, I would have had less time for fun.

Pyramids

“Dig a hole and chuck me in it.” Say those that do not wish money spent on them when they go. Use it on the living. When the time comes the families rarely heed that wish. They feel ashamed if they don’t have a decent funeral for them. So, people set about arranging a bonfire of sorts or a burial. Unless the bonfire is upon a pile of wood and set to sea, the bones must be ground down by stone balls until it is fine and uniform enough to fill an urn. One can elect for a wooden cross or if the person has an image to maintain they will have a headstone commissioned. The very wealthy might elect to be placed inside a large tomb. These solid stone funeral accoutrements get covered in lichen and despite being made of seemingly stern stuff, they degrade as the years pass. The engraved letters become barely readable. The headstone gradually tilts, sinking into the earth until one day it falls over completely - with or without a kick from a bored youth. It is subsumed by nature. Pyramids were designed to stay intact for eternity. Alas, people stole the nice outer stones, ransacked the treasure, and did not let the bones of their forefathers remain in situ forever.

If a burn up or a burial seem too ordinary there are ever more ingenious ways to dispose of people. Your degraded body can be handed to medical students to practice chopping and slicing up. If that doesn’t take your fancy you might consider being vitrified and stored at a low temperature. For a while that is, until someone finds the cost too burdensome and defrosts you. Unless you are defrosted slowly, a smack with a hammer will shatter your hopes of being revived into millions of pieces. Imagine returning at a future date with no family alive, no friends and to a world too different to understand.

We need not worry right now about the outturn of our body when we pass away. Instead, we can delve into the higher-level drives. These sit upon the basic ones, curiosity, selfishness, and reward, and they vary substantially from person to person. Some want to leave a legacy. Some aspire for greatness. Some want to make sure their family does well long into the future. We want to create things. We may also want to be remembered somehow. We might want to be a part of something grand that alters the way the world works. Possibly making it more efficient more sustainable, more practical, more something. Many of us want credit for our contribution. We want to count. Our body may not remain intact forever but what we achieved can linger. For a while that is until someone comes up with something better, something more fashionable or something smarter.

If you manage to build a living legacy, you will be congratulated on multiple occasions and invited to parties. Adoring fans will applaud you. Getting awards and recognition whilst you are alive is a rewarding thing indeed. We have folk law and legends, names of people long gone that are cited as examples of greatness. This is the type of legacy some aim for. People dwell upon their legacy without giving enough credit to all those that made what they did possible. You may have been the one steering things, but your legacy relied upon souls that sacrificed a lot and worked hard to see your objectives through. The resulting legacy in your mind will be a long list of achievements, but that list gets remarked upon less and less as each day goes by. The list typically gets trimmed to a single item. That single thing that stands out is probably not going to be some grand achievement but a spotlight on your biggest failing.

How grandiose or humble are you feeling today? Do you have a hope that your name, your reputation, your soul will carry on for eternity. Maybe you are content with doing something so that the next generation do not have to suffer in the same way as you did. Do you feel you have done enough so that your children and grandchildren are thriving? Are you happy in the knowledge that you will be soon forgotten once you pass away. All trace of us goes soon after we take our final breath. That seems tragic. When all living relatives die too, we are not even in the memory of anyone anymore. Only historians with time to kill will leaf through the files to get a glimpse of what we did and who we were. I concede that a glimpse of someone's character surfaces in the lyrics, melody, words, and colours of their art. So too will their inner thoughts manifest themselves in the novels and texts that they scribed. A little bit of us is laid down in the strata of humanity's handiwork. It is just a small part of who we are though and only appreciated by a small section of those that proceed us.

What about all those that hope for great acclaim or at least a little recognition but fall short? Some get a little medal of sorts and then think, now what. It is not what they thought would happen. They expected to feel wonderful and powerful and successful and be talked about and instead feel quite flat and disappointed. Your contribution to the art world, the science world, the world of knowledge is a single flower in a meadow that spans out as far as the eyes can see. Lost amongst the many. People console themselves with the thought that they got pleasure from compiling and composing it regardless. Despite all the promotion and effort getting it in front of people, nothing substantial comes of it. You leave it be. It gladdens your heart that it is now finished and available for people to view if they happen upon it.

Worldwide acclaim is an exaggeration. Most of the world speak a different language. Most are interested in a small selection of what is on offer, not all of it by far. Famous people become very ordinary - complete unknowns when they travel outside their closed circles. Galleries have art works placed on every wall and in each alcove. Behind the scenes lie troves of less worthy works. Sometimes a hundred or more stored for each one on display. Some songs reach an audience of zero. Not one person takes the time to listen to them. Millions of songs never heard by anyone. Not a single person. That is aside from those that helped produce it, lest we include the poor family members who bore the brunt of being fed updates periodically on every minor detail.

Some people will always have grand ideas about their creations, believing that what they have made will last as long as a pyramid and make an equally large impression. Instead, the rise and fall of things we create follow the same pattern as the headstones in the graveyard. We forge a song or write a poem; it grabs the attention of a few people then disappears into obscurity. It has a parallel with food. Grown in the field, enjoyed, and returned there via the sewer. Transient entertainment that helps some through the day.

What happens if you are not very sporty, not exactly athletic, not terribly creative nor artistic. You have had a go at joining a rock metal band and that didn't work out very well. You tried some comedy routines but every joke you presented fell flat. Your academic skills are lacking to say the least. You have not got rich parents, nor ones that can give you a leg up in the social scene. You are somewhat stuck but want notoriety and be renown. You want that living legacy and also be remembered in a thousand years' time. For that you will need some luck, some of which you can make yourself. You need to stop thinking rationally. Logical, rational ways do not inspire. Freshness, beauty, and pseudo-talent can win hearts and minds.

Sentiment and emotions reign supreme in the notoriety game hence why there are sports where all the top players are superstars. Yet in different sports equally talented people are relative unknowns. There are accidental celebrities, ones that find themselves in the maelstrom unintentionally, but our scorn rests with those who want to disperse a message persistently to all and many, for their pearls of wisdom are far more relevant than yours and mine. One may eschew these types but fail to avoid those that want their face recognised the world over, doing so simply to get that empty feeling when one reaches the top. We disregard the idea of giving each and every person equal validity. Instead, we strive to become a very-important-person as this allows us to jump the queues and get the most comfortable vantage points.

The blame for undeserved power and influence can be left at the door of those that buy into it. Being admired whilst alive can be advantageous - our time is now. Nevertheless, others will supersede us. Some of us contribute to science and the arts. We may add something to the sum of all knowledge. Others will appreciate this. There is progress. We become more capable as a species. What grates is the perversity of wanting to legitimise a sense of individual lofty distinction.

Only the dumb will bow and wow. I have myself pressed people for an autograph. When I need them to sign a contract. I suppose the one key advantage to being well known, is the ability to be heard when you have a problem. If you try giving everyone a slot in the spotlight, we need to accept that such a timeslot would be very thin indeed.

I liken the difficulty trying to define what art is to the difficulty working out why some gain more prominence than others. It is for neither the lack of trying, nor lack of talent but for a slight air of novelty which captures the imagination that not even luck can provide. The first person to stake the claim, the initial innovator has the most prominence. If you devised a new way to spread paint on a surface, it gets noted. Nevertheless, we pay the most attention to what they did rather than care about the essence of the person behind it. For no discernible reason, someone's profile is raised leaving others in their wake. This can annoy those that wish to be in their place. They will see some take centre stage and think it is a wasted opportunity to do so much more with the attention that they are receiving. In most cases a subject makes the news, we talk about it for a bit, then move on to the next topic of conversation.

You

To keep your notoriety alive and well get a self-portrait made. Hanging up pictures of ourselves is nothing new. Anyone that could afford the paint, canvas and artist's fee have been doing it for centuries. Placing them high up is preferable, so that our image is bearing down on every passing stranger. To get more attention, add a well-known figure into the equation smiling alongside you. However, the main person that is influenced by self-portraits is the person in the frame.

If an image you create happens to be good, nice people will express some encouragement. However, there will be many that don't share your enthusiasm of you, like you do. Far more time is spent curating an image of ourselves than viewing images curated by others. Maybe there are exceptions to that rule, but we value our own self-worth above all else no matter how hard we try to hide it. Some copy your 'originality'. Others will be on the lookout to find fault. To climb, to gain ground, one must push downwards.

Saying something nasty about a portrait slows another's ascent. Alternatively, you can take credit for any help you give. Once again it is you that can feed off the spoils.

You fantasise that people will while away the day talking about you in adoring tones. This fantasy provides the motivation to keep people up to date with all your trials and tribulations. We think about others fleetingly. When people dwell on the subject of you it is predominantly in relation to how they fit in. In all ways, it is always about the self. The ones longing for a rise in stature are the ones found complaining about iniquity/unfairness. Many do have a caring and compassionate nature. They come across as very inclusive, indiscriminate and show little vanity. Whilst being inclusive and non-discriminatory makes society more amenable, we are known for being so because it makes us look good.

A long look in the mirror, apply some makeup, select a dress, fuss about the accessories. Out you go and parade into the event. The worry, the fussing over how you look doesn't end there. You have mirrors in your pocket and some in the toilets to recheck the look. A touch up, hair realignment, some more lipstick. Whilst people are fastidiously self-assessing they pay sparse attention to how others look. Worries how we look are largely misplaced. If everyone is worrying about themselves. Their primary focus is on them, not you. People will compare how you look with how they look for sure, particularly if it impacts them.

The wish to have people thinking highly of us starts with making a good first impression. Then maintaining the image. One reason I am cynical about legacies, pyramids of all sort etc is that I can point to lots of people that I made a huge effort with. I listened to their dull stories, I gave them comfort, I helped them, I shared time with them. It was good at the time, no doubt about that. However, most I don't see anymore. Some are dead. Some only pop into my thoughts very occasionally. Most of what we do is to get us through. All that effort to look good helps at the time but then it seems irrelevant looking back. New people are frequenting the places for the young. New looks, new fashions, and new things in place of what once was. Those that died or were badly injured in wars had a belief that they were fighting for a great cause. It is now seen as an era of yesteryear. The nations they helped preserve may still exist geographically but what they fought for has eroded.

With or without you

Those recognisable by the masses wield gravitas. It is gravitas that gives our words weight. Gravitas incites others to take heed of what we do. Gravitas beats competence. Gravitas incubates a sense of relevance, importance. Notoriety gives us that. Why are we so curious about the notorious? Something catches our

attention and sparks an interest for sure. Why we continue to invest time may depend on how quickly we become bored of someone. It helps to know the leader of the group. Everyone knows the show-off.

A doubly foolish person will buy a piece of clothing with a logo/emblem sewn on to it. It can be a symbol of quality. However, corporations want you to be an unpaid walking advertisement. They should be giving you the clothes for free as you are promoting their products, instead you are paying a premium for them. Madness. People have their faces as their emblem and their soporific personality becomes a brand. To avoid being side-lined, build your popularity and your words gain gravitas. To enter this world of privilege we need to be invited into the club. That entails getting certified, registered, and confirmed as worthy by enough people, by certain people.

Empathy is never equally distributed. Photographs of missing people get plastered on a wall. When people view the display, certain ones will catch their attention. The compassion we have for everyone shown on that wall is not the same. It is a lot more for some than others. Most are too ashamed to admit why. We may feel more duty bound to help if it is someone who works at the same place as us or is a member of the same club. We feel a connection to them. They could be 'one of us', the same tribe or share the same philosophy. Conversely, some are viewed as aliens, outsiders and singled out for numerous reasons.

People hope that their loved ones will be fine, financially, after their demise. Some make a will because they don't want lots of arguments and infighting when they go. This is all very noble. Shortly after someone dies there is a scramble to grab the spoils. During the frenzy of the aftermath, people measure the value of the items left behind rather than measure the value of the person they once had. When the gain in money is a fine compensation for the loss of the individual our priorities can look very misplaced. In a truly loving relationship, no money could make up for what has departed. Benefiting from a death demeans the value of the life ended. Sorting out the mess someone left behind can aid the grieving and bereavement process. Some want a hassle-free inheritance and a remotely arranged funeral. They are the cold brutally self-orientated putrid scabs of society.

Nobody is irreplaceable. It is quite surprising how quickly businesses find work arounds once key figures leave. Loose ends are swept away. Other people are put in place and on it goes. Families find ways to manage one way or another. They may miss your special bread buns but find alternatives, sometimes better. To think that the world will end when you do, is laughable.

Some people provided the guiding force to make key discoveries. The names of these people scar the history books. We believe that if it wasn't for so-and-so then we wouldn't have certain inventions today. However, in virtually all instances if they hadn't found it, then someone else would have, albeit a short time after. Anything worth investigating will get investigated sooner or later. Humanity changes as a collective. Individuals make their contribution, however, no one person is ever the sole vital proponent. No one person is ever vital to humankind's progression. For each person that sped something up there are a lot more that slowed things down. There is a lesson one can draw from this. Working too hard, never knowing when enough is enough, sabotages the time out to enjoy other fruits of life.

Into a tourist shop went we, whereupon the salesman locked the door preventing me and she from leaving until we bought something. Having time to kill and no inclination to go through that again we got talking to a fellow traveller. They mentioned that the country receives five million UOC a day from ships passing through the canal. Why with all that money was there such poverty abound? I told them that with over eighty million people here that is 0.06 UOC per person – enough for one free meal each. People with vast sums to give away face a dilemma. Should they concentrate the philanthropy on a single issue such as a certain disease or try to liven up the days of many in multiple projects. One billion UOC sounds a lot to give away but with several billion with their hands held out, it is less than 1 UOC per person. Help helps for sure but during the good times more are born, and the problem expands.

Before setting off for Christmas in the sunshine once again, I went to get a small present. I told the sweet girl who served me that I was going away. She asked me where, and I produced a banknote from this land locked country. "Errrh - where all those starving children are?" I duly informed her that there is no famine now, all is fine. I didn't get around to explaining that there never was a famine as such. People had been displaced. It was not a shortage of food that led people into refugee camps but politics, namely land grabs. After I left, I thought to myself, hang on, she was not even born when the issue hit the news and became a focus of such media attention. Money was raised, and a portion of it was put to use. However, the long-term damage was huge. People talk positively about neighbouring countries but are puzzled by why one would want to go to this country, which is as good, if anything, better in some ways. Only hard-core travellers visit. Very few business people go there, which means lower inward investment. A country's image tarnished for generations, all because of that feelgood kneejerk reaction.

Too many are too rash, too quick off the mark. They don't get a detailed view before they embark on a project. Many a flyby giver will come, pledge, and then go. No one gets it completely right, but some create a bigger mess. Donations need not be made anonymously. There is no shame in being credited for any help we give, but all gifts spite those that are ignored. *When you raise the profile of one cause, it drowns out others.* Charity can be transformative. It can be cherished though by the recipients regardless of the endlessness of it. By and large we give to the cause that has greatest meaning to us. It is co-consideration selfishness at its finest and unavoidably imperfect. Whether we distribute fairly or awkwardly, we don't need a fortune to make a dent in people's sorrows. We can offer our time instead. That can be valued more in many situations. Too many do nothing but harass those they think should be doing more.

Everyone needs to hear about it

I have questioned the motive for writing this book. There were some rewarding aspects in amongst the tedium. The never-ending editing and refining was enough to deter anyone but the foolhardy. I wrote it for myself, selfishness as always. Curiosity was sated, listening, and debating with many a friend and foe. So far so humdrum. It is available for free. If it were sold, I would not want or need a slice of the profits. However, did I hope it would reach a sizeable audience? Once I am gone, I am gone, but what about taking acclaim while I am still around? No credit is needed for this anyway for it contains not one ounce of credibility.

We could say that what we have put together is informative, educational or provides much needed amusement. It is easy to come up with something to justify it. Defer the truth, make it seem like there is a legitimate reason behind it rather than admit that it was to get noticed. If it turns out that nobody reads it, nothing much is lost. A writer satisfies their own wonderment about the subject matters. Even the few that get engrossed in it, soon forget most of it anyway. Some things stick but then we lose track of where we read it. The rest find ways of debunking it all. Feeling dejected about your lack of success is a feeling you will have to share with the countless other want-to-bees. There is only one queen bee per hive.

A great leader wrote what they thought was the most important document ever produced. Each person was expected to read and learn every chapter in the book. People were frequently tested to make sure they were fully conversant with it all. Those that weren't were sent to re-education classes. The book contained a few good nuggets, a few wise words. However, there are always updates and more things that the leader needed to get across. Political sermons can be ignored if broadcast on the television.

People can change the channel. To stop people with such temerity to duck listening to these important announcements they installed a speaker into every home. The speaker box had a control knob, allowing you to lower the volume a bit, but not turn it off. People in other nations would take a large hammer to such intrusions so other tactics have to be deployed. Is there anything that is so great that it merits chaining people to a desk, forcing them to get to grips with every nuance?

If people have an image to maintain they can fall back on manoeuvres that make it heretical to criticize. It is not just those that use godly references to hammer a religious message home, politicians and superstars in the making use the same tactics.

Can you slate a person building a pyramid however small and innocuous and write a text yourself without that being a little hypocritical? No, you can't.

Attention

We all like attention to some degree. Some much more so than others. We may choose to ignore those that are constantly seeking attention. I often de-elevate them. Nevertheless, attention seekers need not be chastised or always ignored for they deserve some attention as do you.

Whenever an opportunity to dance arose, I would hold out a hand offering someone the chance to join in. Never grabbing, always offering, sometimes being declined, often taken up. When I invite someone to dance with me, I am certainly getting their attention, but am I trying to get the attention of all the onlookers too? Were we in isolation in an empty field it wouldn't make any difference is my claim. Wanting a connection is hard to criticize. I want to leave with them wanting more, nobody else needs to know about it. Many of us are somewhat shy and prefer not to have lots watching, but that is not the case with an attention seeker. Interacting with strangers in this way can start a chain of others following suit and building a great atmosphere. Everyone is taking one another by the hand. Dancing bliss. Once the event is over, we just say toodleypips and never see one another again. The time the place the opportunity.

Positive thinking arises from negative introspection. Scepticism and cynicism lead to freedom. It is useful to know this; everything you have done and will do is largely irrelevant when you look back from the future. Besides, the earth is a fleck of dust in the cosmos. You may feel important, but even those that rose to a degree of prominence are more puppet / figurehead than godly life force. We can manage just fine without you. Only a few will miss you deeply. That is until they die too. We may have been better off if you never existed. What you plot and plan is for your pleasure.

Life is there to be enjoyed. Nothing more. Feel free to enjoy tinkering, tailoring the world. Some will appreciate it. Other maybe not quite so much. Mistakes will be forgotten. Errors corrected. Thoughts fade or become superseded.

Whilst legacies are over rated, we can be grateful for people that made things, did things that made a huge difference to us and our ilk. What they produced gave us pleasure and fulfilment. From music to life changing innovations, without which our life would be so much poorer. It was fortunate that we encountered them and fortunate that they existed during our lifetime.

Have you ever been put on the spot and been asked for your opinion? What you need is one relatable poignant thing to say. Brevity can be powerful. An army general asked me what I thought about current world events. One line is all I needed to give. "What they have done is akin to throwing a grenade into a hornet's nest, now the problem is dispersed and set to grow." We remember snippets of life. We forget most of what we hear. We forget most of what we see. Much of our knowledge is superfluous and not put to use. Much of what we know is only useful for a quiz – which we take part in once a decade. All that waffle you want to get across is not needed. Admittedly, we may need to provide context and depth to accompany the main point we are trying to make. However, you can make a bigger impact by saying less. Quality over quantity. Quantity is forgotten, quality can stick. For a while that is.

Fitting in

The mechanics of popularity is something I have found rather intriguing. There doesn't seem to be a precise formula that one can use to make oneself more popular. Though there are things that certainly do not help and fakery will assist. There are notable trade-offs in this realm to consider too. Being popular and the centre of attention doesn't mean you are necessarily liked by all. Far from it. Classmates fawned prominent souls in public but would tell me in private that they didn't particularly like them very much at all. Arrogance and cockiness made a few the center of attention, they were talked about a lot but were not universally adored. I saw some have prominence for a while, but then fade, becoming eclipsed by someone else.

I was prepared to experiment and see what needed to be done to increase my own popularity. I did consider if it is something to be relished. How popular do I want to be? We may need to adjust some of our ways if we want to fit in and get along better with others. I made an active effort to listen a lot more.

I have noticed something. One could be dishevelled. One could be the least attractive person in the room, but people will talk and talk to you if you listen well. I could have conversations, for hours on end, with all kinds of people regardless of how important or how attractive they were. All using the power of listening. Any questions would be directly related to what they were talking about. As the years passed, I managed to put some finesse into it. I would add succinct anecdotes and gradually put more snippets of my thoughts into the conversation. I spent three quarters of the time listening, making sure what I said was short and to the point. Despite all of this I was still not feeling popular. It only worked in places that were quiet and where it was conducive for talking. The best times were on holidays when people were able to sit until well beyond midnight unburdening their sorrows. Once I hooked someone, I could keep the conversation going for unbelievable lengths of time. This was not too difficult. I overheard some of their friends the next day saying, "that was who you were talking to all night." I had been in queues talking for hours with some fine specimens that ordinarily you might not get the chance to engage with. I soon discovered the art of moving the conversation on in a different direction, well before any boredom set in. Changing tack using clues from body language and signs written on their faces. A long wait could be metamorphosed into a damn good time.

Popularity is akin to leadership. We can't all be the leader, nor can we all be popular. And nor do most want to be. We can all strive

to be accepted though. We endeavour to create friendships that are meaningful to us. Joys are amplified when we have a circle to spend moments with, celebrating our highs and having a morsel of comfort when we are at our low points.

I found myself dividing my time across too many people. It is useful to mingle with many. However, the downside of mingling with too many different groups is that you never feel fully included in any of the groups. You don't get invites. You don't feel a part of something valuable. I needed to devote my attention to one bunch rather than spread myself too thinly. It takes a long time to bond and be accepted. We are naturally cliquey. It is hard work getting in and all too easy to slip out. I only blame myself as so many sets of people have been rather accommodating.

When we meet new people, we feel a bit of an outsider for quite a while. This is normal. It takes a while before we are accepted and privy to all the inner goings on. It is a natural process. Cemented members are sniffy at first but gradual hatching of membership takes place. There is a point where we feel like a paid-up member. It may take persistence to get there, or something triggers acceptance. A certain event can allow us to be included. It is not just trust that forms a barrier. Making space for someone new alters the status quo. There are many barriers in groups, and we like to think of ourselves as more open than what we really are. Deep down we are loath to let our guard down completely and let new entrants shine too much too quickly.

Attractiveness; an agent of attention

The beauty industry is huge. For good reason. Attractiveness trumps all. It beats character, wealth, and aids fame. Attractiveness plays a big part in how we get on in life. I have seen people stop and goggle at handsome bar staff. I have seen others smitten by pretty young things, paying them double the attention of others in the same role. You hear people say that what is inside that matters the most, but our physicality plays a huge part in how we are valued. I thought at first that life would be so much easier for those blessed with good looks. They didn't have to work so hard to get attention. However, I quickly realised that this strength was lost as they aged and needed to be replaced by a personality. I also saw that they had as many problems as the rest of us. Many yearned for even greater perfection in their appearance when all I saw was incredible beauty. I suppose that whilst some could have more affairs and greater opportunities, they can still only have one meaningful relationship at a time. Maybe polygamous to some level if they have the energy, wish and commitment to devote precious time away from other pursuits.

Being attractive is one thing but seeing charlatans at work was a major bugbear; Watching people fall for someone due to the flattery they were given, watching people promise the world and deliver nothing but hardship and heartache. I can't blame someone for getting the girl / bagging the boy by conning and conniving. It beats living on the side-lines. I had the most stupid thought that attractiveness is a gift blessed from one's parents and that credit didn't belong to them. Hence charm was misdirected, but charm works irrespective of whether it is deserved or not. This became an enduring lesson on how we think as youngsters and get the wrong idea about many things. Rather than see the power of charm I would be condescending, wrongfully, and revel in bringing people down to earth. Oh, how different things look in hindsight and how easy it is to forget the troubles of those growing up. Even with hindsight and new awareness, old habits die hard.

I enjoy talking to people of all ages. With older people, it can be at a higher level. Less needs to be said to convey our thoughts, but I have to admit that nothing surpasses the special enjoyment I get from talking to highly feminine characters in their prime. The optimum age is somewhere between 19 and 25 but this is me and subject to many exceptions. Any younger and their lack of substance doesn't inspire. Too much older and the magic is not quite there. Certain aspects of youth draw me in. The eagerness of life. Being far less worldly wise thus not tainted - yet. Listening to the inflections of their voice is magnetic, irrespective of any accents. That coupled with their wondrous facial expressions. I see the optimism and the openness that fades and gets lost with age.

I had confidence aplenty in all situations except courting. I could approach anyone I wanted and get a conversation going, not a problem whatsoever. Getting a conversation going was easy unless it was with someone that could be a potential suitor. I was dating phobic, full of fear in the moment. It wasn't until I got a partner that I lost this fear entirely. Now, if a conversation went awry, I could correct it. If I jumbled sentences up and it all went wrong, I would just say what the heck am I saying and start again. Doing so made me appear most human and the fluster added rather than detracted from the event.

There is a state before I become fully awake where I have the most vivid delightful dreams. And in those dreams, I have often pictured finding a friend, someone endearing and feminine. A romance free side kick. Someone whom I share a good deal of time with without the bedevilment of sex. Of course, anyone attractive that you spend time with, will grow and grow on you. It is rare for it to work for long. I thought finding such a friend was

highly unlikely. After decades of having that at the back of my mind, I did find such a friend. She was there in plain sight. I didn't see it at first. When I did it was truly great. As predicted, it didn't last anywhere near as long as I wished it had. I knew what to do and what not to do. Yet, I still messed it up. One thing is for sure, I made use of the time and will always be glad I met her. The sex came and went. That was not the problem though. All this "I can die happy now", rings true. I want to live happy. I have had the taste of the most sumptuous caviar, and now nothing competes, nothing satisfies, nothing compensates. I did a lot right, knowing that helps not. We relate to some souls decidedly more than others. We need them to like us in equal measure. I could detail so much that gives me a belief that we had something, something very good. I despise the haters that set up my downfall. Ultimately, I blame myself for losing to those better at politics. I can't even say that I will learn for the next time. A next time is too improbable.

This chapter is particularly polemical, and I speak here further about the objective of me trying to fit in. When I look back and think about how I have been treated by others, I would say that I have nothing much to complain about. Nevertheless, I still ponder about all those instances of rejection. There were countless occasions where I wasn't given the chance. One look and instant rejection. Dismissed without batting an eyelid. You then have a multitude of options. Do I ignore it and worry not? Do I suppress how irritated I get by it, mutter something along the lines of stuck-up cow, arrogant pig. Am I looking at it in the right way?

We can be enchanted by attractive people. Enchanted by those with character. We are drawn to them. We wish for some engagement with them. However, the feelings are not always mutual. They ignore us. We might as well not exist as far as they are concerned. Engagement is effectively, not allowed. Any engagement that is forthcoming, is often the bare diplomatic minimum. A few words before they move away and talk to someone else. We get annoyed by people's indifference towards us. People take that nonchalance towards them as a slight. Few enjoy being stonewalled. Whilst we are bothered about these situations, these folks are oblivious to any hurt they cause.

You might have someone at the forefront of your mind. They most certainly do not vice versa. It is hard for some to ignore how exasperating they can find this. Such things shouldn't trouble us, but they do. In the dating context, we are not reassured in any shape or form by a friend saying that we could do better than that. We are as valid as the next person, are we not. We have good points. We are worthy. We are great – if only we had the opportunity to get this person to see it, is what we muse.

When I peruse the market stalls and mingle in the streets, some people stand out. Some I recognize as friends, fellow artisans, and ones I have taken a fancy too. The rest are nowt more than miscellaneous objects. They form the hue of an insignificant haze. Only some have importance to me. Most I disregard, barely noticing their presence unless they get physically in the way. There are many people who I just do not have time for. I make quick judgements and for the most trivial of reasons I discount people on a whim. I am guilty of noticing what I want to notice. My focus lingers on what appeals to me. I ignore the rest. People in my surroundings grey out. I don't pay them much attention, usually no attention whatsoever. If I don't give everyone the same level of attention, how can I justify condemning people for ignoring me. I want respect from others whilst not respecting each and all that cross my path.

By and large I choose who I speak to and most certainly pick who I approach. I will sidle up to a valent soul ignoring another who has body art on show, body art faded to that convict blue. My disdain reflects a prejudice with absolutely no regard for how great a person they may be. When I learn the value of relinquishing all self-importance, I can begin to be as admirable as so many others. Many manage to be very cordial, showing true grace and compassion towards everyone they meet. Or do I not notice other people's propensity to give many a wide berth. People that appear snobbish or infantile or hard or whatever, and such characters do not exist. Doesn't everyone avoid some types. Do we all have some wariness brought about by bad experiences or stories told to us by our parents and friends?

Proving oneself

Somebody told me that their father has missed out on so much. Not around to see what his son have achieved. How far he had gone in his career. Never saw the house he has fixed up and so on. Who is the one that really missed out? It is the son the most. The son relished showing his father all these things. We want to know in our mind, that things are known, in the minds of others.

How many times do you hear people say that they were written off as a failure, but proved the doubters wrong. The scornful teachers that didn't champion your cause will be long retired by the time you make a success of something. They won't care if you become greater than the greatest chump in history. No amount of awards and accolades will make them feel any contrition. You rarely get the opportunity to go back and face the castigator. You may hope that they hear about you in the news or on the grapevine or even indulge in the fantasy that they will look you up and discover how you have turned out. In practice the score is only settled in your own head, not in anyone else's. The same

goes with any social encounter for when another opportunity arises to present your case again, they will simply change the rules or obfuscate. They may pretend they can't fully recall the events or twist the accuracy of what was said or meant. They will use the doctor's trick to deny being in the wrong. It goes like this. You tell the lady that she is going to have a boy. However, you write in your notes that she is going to have a girl. You get the gist. If she says you got it wrong, then you produce the notes. Trying to prove yourself worthy or prove to others that they were wrong can be futile. We want to prove things to create a happy ending to the story in *our* mind.

Two heads. Your head and the other. You want to know the information in the head of the other is as you want it to be. That way your head knows that they know. They may forget. They may move away. They may rewrite that information and you may never know that they no longer know what you thought they knew. You thought you had the information in their head settled. There are two heads but the one head, your head is the head that plays with your priorities. We can worry about the information in the head of another if we believe they can stymie our goals. The information in the head of the other can on occasion help or hinder our ability to fit in. However, for the most part we want to know in our head that information in the head of another is accurate simply to fill a curiosity pathway. Nothing more. We simply want to know that they know.

People can misconstrue what we have said. They misunderstand us. We like to set the record straight. We want people to get the facts right. There are also times where people make a rather good point, and we struggle to counter their argument. We find the counter to their point and want to return to it. From our point of view, it is unfinished business, from their point of view it means very little. They feel they won the debate. We want to bring the subject up again and challenge them once more. All they want to do is move on with what they are doing. Not go over something that means little to them.

We like to get others to know us a little more, often to prove that we are as worthy as them. What prey is so great about wanting the last word and wanting to show them? To the backdrop of very loud, fine, live, music I danced hand in hand with her. We danced together rather well. In between songs she disappeared. She vanished. Then somebody very tall and somewhat thin came over and said something to the effect that I was good at scaring them off. He had an eye on her for a while and now had lost his chance. I was taken aback somewhat. As always, wary of any potential violence coming my way. I am accustomed to dancing with lots of people, the more feminine the better. Just for the fun of it. This

to me was not dating, it was nothing other than having a good time. A few minutes later she returned, and of course we danced some more. This time a little more provocatively. Why was I unable to resist making sure the lanky git saw us together again? The journey towards not caring at all about the respect of others is long and hard. The desire to show them is compelling. The chance of seeing any of these people again, anywhere, is slim but winning a situation can be the focus of the moment. Some may say that they do not care about what other people think, but their actions belie the substance of such claims. Even if it is just that, wanting others to know that you don't care what other people think.

People will accuse you of misdemeanours, brand you a money grabber, a gossip monger etc. The people that accuse you of such things are, more often than not, guilty themselves of such behaviours. Accusing you is camouflage - a way of obscuring the truth about themselves. They end up red faced when you effectively place a mirror between you and them. Are you accusing me of x to conceal the fact that you are even more x than me?

There I am talking to three pretty lovelies and the subject of motor racing comes up. I point to my friend who was standing some way away and tell them that he is a fine engineer in a car engine company. They turned to look at my friend briefly and acknowledged what I had said, and we carried on the conversation for a while. Later however this friend thanked me for disrespecting him. I pointed out that firstly I am not in the habit of putting someone down to impress people, especially those that I have just met. Secondly, I had not said anything untoward, I was in fact in praise of him. This is an example of how some people make assumptions about your behaviour and resort to a negative view. Nothing would change his mind. I had belittled him and that was that. I cared for my own reputation. I can't claim that I never care about what other people think as in this case I most certainly did. We want to maintain our reputation; decent and trusted.

A feud. A battle. A disagreement. Discord. Few of us escape problems with some people. One thing I do know is that when I moved away I had very little inclination to return to those battle grounds to set the record straight. Maybe we can stay where we are but consider how important these disputes would be, were we living far away.

A point of difference

Too similar, too different who do we fit in the best with? Similar but with points of difference works nicely. Similar to others in many respects whilst having something a little different to give us

a sense of identity. If we become a lot wealthier, we are viewed differently, spitting us out of former circles. Some will take great satisfaction by going in the other direction; being capable of living a sparse existence and being boastful of how much they can manage without. Some have the desire to be well known thus different from the rest. Others may highlight their ownership of a unique possession, different to that of everyone else.

Friendship groups are spawned through similar interests. Same hobby, same adventures, same something. Whilst we share similar interests, we each add something different and that helps avoid having too much stale conversation. Interest groups working for a common cause benefit from having people with unique things to bring to the table. Similar aims, a shared vision and accepting those that are a little odd. In the cave dwelling days, each of us would be put to use. Some cooking, some hunting, some sorting the fire. Each of us had a role to play that gave us a place in the group. Together as one, but all with different skills on hand. It gave each a sense of being needed and valued. If you don't stand out in some way you might appear a bit dull. Your contribution might be big, but do not be under any illusion that you can't be replaced even if by someone that can do nearly as well, sufficiently to get by. Haughty individuals may wander upon the stage thinking that people can't do without them. They are alarmed when shown this is not the case when things carry on in their absence.

You can mix with people from all walks of life, but the understanding is so much greater with those on the same level. People with different privileges have a different outlook. Those who had careers in the army struggle to convey what it is was like on the battlefield to those that have never immersed themselves in it. Memories and understanding are derived from physical experiences. To relate with them you had to be there.

Fakes and frauds

Our basic personality can be adapted with a behavioural mask akin to an actor playing a part in a film. A different mask for different situations. We meet those that are adept at putting on a show in public but have a whole different nature out of view. Comedians with no humour at home. Kind and caring on the surface yet extreme bullies behind closed doors. Some will just take people as they find them, never getting to see the other side of a person's personality. There is not a lot one can do when you get an insight into that which would be preferred to be kept hidden. People may favour living with the devil they know than the devil they don't. I admit to dropping sarcastic comments that allude to my knowledge of what is going on.

Nobody is as good as you. No one is as clever as you. No one can behave as perfectly as you. No one is as fault free as you are. Therefore, we shun lots that don't meet our high standards. We shun more and more until we create a few utopic friend circles. Utopic circles that are invariably rather dreary. Given that no one is as perfect as us, we must determine how bad someone is rated before we shun them. Alternatively, we can own up to ourselves. We can recognise our own failings. We can look at the positives in people and adjust how much time we are going to spend with them. For me to fit in, I have had to give people allowances for their imperfections. I understand that life is not black and white. I need to think about a lot of things more before I shun. Those I don't shun have positives that outweigh their imperfections.

I have had to put up with those that talk mainly about themselves, rarely listening to me for very long. Some have political views that are not concordant with my world view. The way some treat animals is not nice. I let them know but I don't shun. If I had shunned anyone that didn't share my principles, my life would be so much poorer. Besides, my principles have not stayed steady and consistent.

People come up to me with a lot of excitement, a glint in their eye, and tell me about the people they think are amazing. Not only are these people thought of as the most attractive handsome beautiful creatures on earth, but they are also in awe of their wonderful careers. There is no mention of the horrid working hours. Nor the tiresome nature of the things that go along with the so-called super job they have. To the dismay of those that have seen it all before, suckers flock to these people over and over again. They are not special but rather unremarkable. Keen to couple up, all is well for a while until reality bites. The duped will feel some disillusionment for being taken in. The lure becomes a trap of sorts when it results in children aplenty. I don't want to copy them nor emulate their style. I just get tired of biting my tongue and not expressing a bit of disdain. However, I do not really have any justification to say that the way I am is in any way better than the frivolous. No amount of effort building an image will entice them all, but I have to play the game to get a bit of what I want.

We want to be heard. We want to be listened to, all of us. Some like to be the center of attention at every gathering. Then there are the notorious braggers who can't refrain from boasting about all the things that they have been doing. I meet parents that forget that we have all had children ourselves and don't see what I see; their children are as standard as any other. I don't really think they are dull, but I don't share their wonderment to that same extent. Neither do I have the same wish to talk for ever

more about nappies and play school and how quickly they have come on.

People have views that are entrenched. People construe things in a multitude of ways. People say one thing in one scenario and something else in another. It can be tiresome trying to fathom what people really mean. It takes a lot of effort to get to the bottom of the story. So, we let a lot go and leave people to it. We don't need to be right all the time. We give up trying to convert. In respect of the newly parents, their kids are the main focus at the moment as anyone that has been there knows all too well. Hence, I need to keep reminding myself that what is important to them is equal to what is important to me.

After countless conversations with people all over the world I began to realise that everyone has analysed life, their life, and the nature of being far more thoroughly than I thought. However, lots shy away from examining anything that presses too far into their deeply seated outlook. Is there a time and place for certain discussions? Sorry Sir, but I will decide what is and what isn't a suitable topic of conversation. Indeed, I may steer clear of religion and politics. They are known to make people speak louder and more aggressively. Faith in a religion is often deemed too sacrosanct to debate. However outside of those realms there is much to be thrashed out. You may not wish to think too hard and avoid being challenged. That is fine, but you can encourage those that are interested to engage. You may think it is not befitting the occasion - not the time or place, but that is you pressing your ways on those that would rather decide for themselves. Having a fear of what we are allowed to talk about, however crazy and however provocative is a real menace in a society. I always felt able to keep on the right side of a confusing line between confronting objections to ideas and winding people up for the sake of it. Whether people understood the reasoning behind my angle of thought remains to be seen. Personally, I liked to have no taboos, but the fear of delving where people don't want to allow is genuine. It is made much harder as the amount people listen dwindles rapidly compared to the amount they spiel, when things close to their heart are brought up.

I became aware of all those in countless fields that could do vastly more than me. And were so much quicker on the uptake. If you need a demonstration that the earth did not flinch nor stop when you were born, take a glance at the fine accomplishments of uncountable other people living and gone. Not only are there lots of people out there that are grander than you, but some have been on a psychology course. They now know what we are all thinking and understand all our behaviours. Having some one-

upmanship can be a novelty but is not endearing if played upon too often.

The want of approval

Wanting approval from others lasts long after we leave the education system. It can dictate many things. From what we wear to how we talk and what we say. We find ourselves wanting a unique identity, but not being too different that we stand out, increasing the likelihood of getting mocked. Nothing beats the feeling of approval from those we like and respect. We need our choices validated.

Vindication. Proving the doubters wrong. Demonstrating a new way, something different with sceptics all around. When we raise ourselves above the parapet, boldly, we are hoping for vindication. People are unconvinced at first but then begin to acquiesce, taking more heed and copying our lead. How we each follow fashion or try to go against it, is one measure of our appetite for approval. We have been wearing clothing of some sort since the Stone Age, marking out our tribe and it frames part of our identity. Fashion emerges from a novel style that catches the attention. Fashion may disregard practicality. Fashion or accessories, including metal pushed through the skin etc, gradually develop, with one person implementing the change. The more people that like it, the more you get copying. If you are hoping to popularise something, target the right people. Some people will be significantly more influential than others. A thousand times more so. There are crucial tipping points on the path towards mass embracement. Some people will object to the widespread uptake of an item and then differentiate themselves with their slightly different choices. You can't really win. You just take a stance willingly or by default.

Being a little weird, odd, draws attention but not always approval or acceptance. If our presentation/appearance goes too far outside of cultural norms it becomes hard to fit in. We may enjoy the admiration we get from our point of difference. We like people noticing how stylish we are. However, few are comfortable with being stared at for abject unconformity. Fitting in requires moderation.

If you wear something the same as that of a well know individual the endorsement provides assurance and affirmation that your selection is good. Anyone advocating one style over another can be doing one of two things. Either they are wanting to get noticed for their superior choices or they are profiting via sponsorship in a game of collusion and subterfuge. A magnificent fresh stylish style gives people confidence to walk with their head held high so therefore, who is superior and omniscient with any right to spoil the party.

There are unwritten rules. We go against them at our peril. When and where did these rules come from? Well, someone somewhere, at some point, set out the so-called accepted fashions that become common place. Most ideas that we think are new turn out to be recycled reformulations, innovative but not de facto inventive. We give credit to someone who claims to be inventive when they have done little more than improved on the hard work of others. The scope for adaptation is usually rather limited. Maybe an adjustment to the size and scale, cleaner lines with slightly more function. Very little of what people do, say, or make is ever truly original. We just rearrange reorder and recalibrate the things around us like a jigsaw puzzle to see what does and doesn't fit within the range of possibilities. You can assemble the pieces in the box or outside of it. You can place them upside down or balance them on their edge. You can change the interlocking nobbles and mess with the material, but it is still nothing more than a minor evolution. Rarely is it something revolutionary. In a flash of inspiration, we take something from one already established field and use it in another.

I never lose sight of the fact that someone somewhere makes up the rules whether through a democratic process or via the golden rule, thee who has the gold makes the rules. When someone says that you can't do something, it is because a rule has been devised by a person or a panel of board members. You do not have to view restrictions as being set in stone.

To coerce us to comply, officious people are employed then deployed to enforce the decrees of the governing bodies. The aim is to corral us through their turnstiles of control. An objector may need to negotiate with the individual in the highest position of power, those with the most sway to override the officious people below. Officialdom may stem from proven best practices, but not always. Officialdom often stems from personal preferences, that of the person at the centre of control. People master the art of power and control. They become the head of officialdom. The officialdom use officious people to exert their will, persuading people that certain things are to be the norm and right. Sometimes the officialdom is seen as the least worst governing body that we have to put up with.

Societies pressure us to conform, enticing us to blend in. If we break from the norm we get pulled aside and questioned about why we are not doing the same as everyone else. Being a pioneer is challenging. Thus, any differences we have are outweighed by countless things in common with the majority. We become more alike than unique as the gradual corralling erodes our freedom of expression. Pushing out and making a mark for yourself is

appealing, nevertheless joining in and being convivial is generally more rewarding than being in isolation.

My word is my bond – the honour system of most global trade. We carry this same notion to promises we make to one another. Our ego is fed through having a good reputation and for following through with our promises. Selfishness – preserving the value of the self.

A sign of the impact someone made in their community can be measured by the numbers of people spilling out into the courtyard at the funeral service. Some may take stock of this and adjust their ways, having a fear of a small crowd attending theirs. There are occasions where people may not have anyone at their funeral apart from the minister, not because they were unpopular, but because they outlived all their friends. The idea of having a funeral before you die is far from original, many have considered the benefits. Not only can you bid farewell to those you love and loath, but you can ensure the right songs are played too.

The onset of death can hasten the priorities we make. Many will wish to make a success of something before their parents and loved ones pass away. This desire to show your true colours is to prevent the onset of regret. Unlike other mistakes you can't do anything in this respect once people are gone. If we missed the chance to prove oneself before our loved ones go, we may resort to striving harder in the name of that someone we loved. Whether it is a tribute or a wanting for our parents to be proud of us, it is kind of odd that we can care what someone would think even when they are dead. Do I have to spell it out? It is for you not for them.

A near miss, a wakeup call, or someone close to us dies and we are stirred into action. Stirred with a new sense of urgency. Live life to the full say some. This is all well and good, but during the preoccupation of trying to fit so much in, we lose a lot that is loved in taking things easy. Doing nothing for a whole day can be as productive and balanced as racing around in a perpetual daze. You still get things done and done with relish but being too busy comes at a price. It takes away from time to reflect.

There is no duty to be mindful of what it is all about. There is no obligation to spend a set amount of time, or any time at all, pondering or pontificating. It is possibly a luxury for those that want to accommodate it. If you can't think of anything to think about, perhaps ask yourself "what is enjoyment?" What does it mean deep down at any level? We say, "we are enjoying it", we say we enjoy sex, a lunch, the times reminiscing and so on but what does it mean and what is the essence of it? Define the feelings, the chemistry of it.

Universally admired

When I come across people that are popular and entertaining. People that draw others in. I ask myself what is involved in being like that. I know it is best to be accommodating, laugh at other people's jokes and show a reasonable degree of interest in what others are doing. It is also helpful to avoid prejudicial comments. We can provide affirmation, adding to what others are saying rather than being frequently contrary and difficult. Speaking about our own circumstances with clarity, passion without over exuberance. None of which is easy to elucidate, but better understood through careful observation of those that manage it well.

You may watch those that are accessible to a fair degree but will wander off and mingle to avoid over playing it - unconsciously leaving people wanting more. Adaptability is key. It is relevant in popularity as it is in so many other areas of life. You need to switch from being serious some of the time to using comical and cheerful banter depending upon the people you are with. Some people are not interested in downbeat conversations, whereas others want more absorbing discourse.

The aspiration to be loved by all, is naïve. One should not be surprised when disgruntlement surfaces and streams of negative comments roll in as your notoriety radiates. When more people know of you, you become exposed to a wider set of views. If we all liked the same thing, then you could in theory be universally admired. However, that is not the case. There will be a percentage that are willing to home in on what they regard as your negative attributes. It is simple maths; more exposure means more chance of criticism.

We find ourselves able to fit in better in some situations than others. We may need to accept that. Deeper dialogue interests me the most, but that doesn't sit well with those that want to stick to brevity, buoyancy, and frivolity. Don't be fooled, these meaningful conversations stick in people's mind, they have an impact. Frivolity fades fast. I like to test ideas and propositions on lots of people to see what objections arise. I would use this ability to mingle with the masses to hear people's counter arguments. It would not matter who they were, not their age nor work status. To me, all views were useful. I saw no point in formulating an answer to a question that could not be understood by the majority. Granted, some effort on their behalf is required at times. No matter how careful and what clarity employed, it doesn't take much for people to pick up the wrong end of the stick and start hitting you with it. Usually when they don't absorb everything that was said. I have reservations about coming out with the bleeding obvious, but what may seem obvious to me is

not always quite so for others. Some gems were brought to the fore by some remarkably innocent individuals who I least expected to provide insight. Holes could be filled, and I would be re-armoured for the next victim.

I asked a taxi driver if they had ever done anything altruistic. He ummed and ahed for a while, then admitted that he was not too sure what the word meant. When I explained it, he understood the concept and thought about it for a bit. The driver couldn't provide an instance of altruism on their own part. The same problem arose a week later when I asked someone else the same question. They too didn't know what it meant. Then the person who was in the taxi with me the week before piped up and said that she didn't know what it meant either until I explained it. That got me a bit worried, so that night I asked some thirty people if they could tell me what altruism is. One middle aged soul sat there racking their mind akin to when someone is trying to bring an answer to a quiz question to the fore. Pensioners, managers, bar staff, even a whole table full of dinners could not provide any sort of definition. This was quite a shock, a revelation, and I felt that care was needed in any writing; it had to be devoid of too much jargon. Words that I presumed were quite common were not remotely so. We can reduce it a bit and keep the eloquence.

Modesty

When I have been sarcastically accused of being modest, I would look down below the navel and declare that I have nothing to be modest about. I have seen the temptation to boast about what we have and what we get up to, but I know it is not always great to be on the receiving end of that. Achievements are relative. They matter to us individually whether others see them as significant or not. Someone could be justifiably pleased with their piddly window sill plant display as another is with their massive manicured garden.

People only recall key points, maybe one in a thousand of the words you speak. For the most part, even you only remember the gist of what you said yourself. Instead of remembering everything people say, we do tend to build a picture of whether someone is harmonious or cantankerous. Being argumentative or a tendency to slate what others love doesn't imbue harmony. Our tastes vary considerably. People will talk about films and musicians that they rate highly. Whilst we may rate them far less highly, we can show recognition for all the awards received, acknowledging that they have a large following etc. Unless you are playing one person off against another, it doesn't help your cause to say something is rubbish knowing others like it a lot. You don't have to share the same level of wonderment, but neither do you need to be

awkward all the time. Being negative about too much is not conducive with fitting in.

I wonder at times if I am special or just another mediocre average comrade. Sometimes I see my own magnificence in full glory. Then fall scythed with shattered illusions, becoming rather uncertain of any merit to my existence. I suspect most know their place, but the ones with the highest self-esteem appear to have a lot of fun. If you make some wildly wild claims, more fantastic than fiction you get more than just widespread attention, you get to a point of self-delusion providing hope and faith to the desperate. Cynics may berate such people, but sometimes it takes some fake hope to motivate people into action. People have taken positive steps to apply for a job. They get the courage to present themselves well at the interview, all because someone has blessed them with a block of bullshit.

The outlandish to the dark horse

Are you an extrovert or an introvert? Have you undergone some phoney test to measure it? Personality tests are ideally suited for entertaining people on their lunch breaks or kept as handy ice breakers to get conversations going. Our introverted-ness/extroverted-ness is not fixed. You can choose to be more introverted. If you work on your confidence, you can become more extroverted. The homogenisation of the masses, people becoming more and more alike, gains traction when parents seek medication for their children to make them more extroverted. This shifts the child away from being true to themselves. There is beauty in diversity and dryness in too much indistinguishability, where all are blended into one mass of uniform sameness.

Some people are quite bold in some circumstances and more reserved in others. We might be shy at work and forward in play. It can be a mistake to assume that people who seem quite quiet standing in front of you are like that elsewhere. We are not one or the other, neither introverted nor extroverted, but somewhere in between the two. Some are comfortable addressing a large crowd yet shy in other situations.

Fitting in can be a challenge, a struggle, a problem at times. Whilst this struggle plays out, we might take heart in the non-judgemental companionship that animals in our care provide. The meaningful bonds that we form with non-human animals can sometime replace the need for human connection entirely. Having said that, for most of us, what evokes the magic in lots of activities is the human element. Those that travel around with their binoculars and cameras bird watching are in principle out to see the birds, but it is discussions about what we have seen and noticed with others that can have the big impact. We learn the tricks of the trade and swap notes. In so much of life it is not

always the thing itself, but the human element associated with it that is the draw.

The toughest of the tough hard cases out there were not so unflinching when they were small. They would stay by their mother's side and venture nervously at first. They would not go too far before running back to her. If she is around, they are bolder. They explore a little then return, gradually becoming more confident. We are braver when we have the support of others. Group dynamics embolden us too. With the support of the group, we gradually strengthen our resolve. That resolve can be enhanced by having lots egging us on. We get the belief that we are doing the right thing from the hints, suggestions, and pressure from others. The right thing for some that is. Usually them.

No one can go through life without looking stupid at times. Laughing at yourself makes it irrelevant. Worrying about embarrassment drags down our confidence. It is so much easier to hide away in your cubbyhole and spiral down retreating further from face-to-face interaction. In most cases there is no actual danger or risk of physical harm just pathos, imagined worry about being thought of as ineligible. Real confidence can take years to acquire and sadly in a few short moments it can be taken away. A great deal of work is required to bring people that have been attacked in some way, back to how they were before.

Labels

I have often heard the argument that there is no such thing as normal. Everyone is a little different, but some seem to stand out that bit more. We see judgement in action. Snide remarks and people distancing themselves. We could talk about being normal in a wide range of respects describing our mannerisms along with obsessions, compulsions, and aversions. Normal in appearance. Normal in habits. Normal in manner. Normal in everyday functions. Normal experience of pain vs weird pleasure. Normal in the way we are treated. Normal in the way we are accepted. Normal in our comprehension of things. Normal in what you notice and what most normally ignore. Lucky not to know. Normal routine where any upset can cause distress. What we can do normally but sometimes can't manage. Thoughts and feelings can be normal to us but alien to others. Feeling normal can count in an objective of fitting in, but there are instances where it is coupled with wishing to be a little different.

Measuring and categorising normality is fraught with contention. Generalising can get us into trouble. It could be something about us that is at such a level that it tips the scales. The oddity is enough for many to describe it as abnormal. People may support and comfort us with the notion that no one is normal and that nothing is normal. However, it can be a proper problem. It might be a

difference that we like or hate, so we can either attempt to change where possible or embrace it. Then there are those that think they are normal but are surprised to find out that their reality is not shared by everyone. When they discuss the way they see things, and describe it to people, they realise that it is not as normal as they assumed.

You could draw up a long list of things that make a person different. Our characteristics, things derived from our individual genome and things that happened or not during our development. From abuse or neglect to living with overbearing parents. Countless circumstances can cast a shadow on the way we behave and react. You may consider yourself, rightly or wrongly, to be normal in some respects and less so in others.

Whether we wish to be completely normal or not, whatever that may be, there is something to be said for being unusual and interesting - up to a point. People have major issues that grow and expand making ordinary tasks harder by the day. When we have difficulties doing these everyday things, things that plenty of others manage with ease, it can come as a relief when an official diagnosis is found. Once a label has been put on it, we can blame our genes, it is something we are born with. Our faults lie with our parents or an outside agent. Our identity can become framed by the label put on us. We don't object to it, instead see it as something that gives us that little bit extra. We can be proud of it regardless of whether it is seen as a form of disability or not. Aside from it being a talking point it can be called upon as an excuse for goofy behaviour and draws wanted scrutiny of our character. Those with a uniqueness may feel cherished because of it. You get this niggling sense that having a label is a benefit. It becomes a part of someone's identity, despite the drawbacks that can undoubtedly be very inhibiting.

People discover that they get lots of attention because of their disorder. They didn't use it at first to gain attention, they simply noticed that people were curious and interested in their problems. The attention is welcome to some degree. We don't like to be viewed as an attention seeker, but it is tempting to play on things. Our problems make us stand out.

We select something on our mind to talk about, often something piffle or a trifle concern. It may or may not be of interest to others. It might be about something that most won't take much heed of. However, we can listen regardless and let people fulfil their wish to get what they have to say off their chest. It is good to listen, it is great, fantastic to listen, there is no doubt about that. Some talk about nothing bar their normalcy problems though. When it is that and only that every time, I try to change the subject. There is more to the person than just their normalcy issues. I can't keep

giving them attention solely because of the issue. No matter how big the handicap, impediment or whatever the abnormality thing is, an individual will have real achievements and good qualities to refer to. There are countless things to talk about. Things going on in the world, not just related to them and what they are facing all the while. I ramp up the engagement when talking about things that are not about their disorder. I give positive feedback sometimes a bit exaggerated. It promotes talk away from their endless focus on their normalcy matters.

Some with life issues hide away. The spotlight lingers on others, they walk in the shadows. Whilst they don't appear to fit in as well as others, they may show themselves in areas that we don't all get to see. We have expectations of people and a want-to-sort-it mentality. Some don't want to be fixed. Our advice may come from a place of good intentions, but it might not be welcome or necessary. Living by your own standards and leading by example is not the same as wishing others to blossom with the same vibrancy in the same situations. Being normal, being conformist is an untidy concept with such a mishmash of contrasting characters around. We can live as a recluse, but good company is good company either via inclusion at the fringe or in the mainstream.

I recall the excitement of our cat having a litter of five kittens but was unsettled to see one of them being pushed away. The runt was rejected. We were able to intervene and ensure its survival. It leads me to propose that many animals including us are naturally, inherently, inclined to harshly discriminate based upon a normality judgement. Our tolerance for certain types, changes over time. It goes in cycles with acceptance to persecution and back again. We can be accommodating for a while then less so, altering people's ability to fit in. Some people will always be prejudicial, but our initial distaste and wariness tends to be pushed aside when we understand a person more.

There will always be some form of inconsistency in the way we treat people according to appearance. People will find something to berate us with. For being fat, unsymmetrical, having acne, a lisp, or a myriad of other reasons. Many will mask and hide the problem where they can, for they can't be bothered with the issue. They don't want to be defined by their noticeable physical oddity. It is a tiresome timewasting hassle to be constantly dealing with the questions. It becomes a barrier that gets in the way of engaging with people about the task in hand. We have other subjects on our mind and things we want to be talking about instead.

We complain about people discriminating against us, particularly those that do so because of our physical differences. Yet, who is

saintly enough to never judge others in any way whatsoever? We find reason to scorn others, perhaps for their education, accent, dress sense, conduct, manners, spending habits and so on. Few are immune. We think that these kinds of judgements are fair but saying anything derogatory about physical differences is not. All forms of discrimination cause anguish.

To want

Do you want something? Do you want to change? Do you want to achieve something? There is a difference between wanting change and truly wanting to change. There is a difference between wanting something and truly wanting something. Only those that make a wholehearted effort to change will change. Only those that make a wholehearted effort to get will get. To bring about change there must be an absolute wish for it. We will assume that the change is for the better according to the one with the problem. Spelling out the steps is one thing. Getting on with it is something else entirely. Someone that wants something puts themselves through any reasonable measure to achieve it. They will confront and deal with each hurdle they face. Once the serious declaration of wanting to do something about the problem has been made, the battle begins. With the help of people with the relevant expertise, progress is usually quite quick. Nobody can wave a magic wand, and all comes right. The most important thing is the desire to change.

All of us will experience issues to some degree and it is a mistake to consider any disorder to be something you either have or you don't. There are variations in the presumed severity. Inconsistent decrees are made as to whether it even matters or not. Many will not regard it as a problem, whereas others will see it as the be all and end all. We will each handle things very differently and who decides when the threshold is exceeded to then stick the label on it, provides lots of scope for contention. If you are on the cusp, you might never get a diagnosis and could quite easily consider it normal, something that we live with. You may need to talk to a lot of different people to compare your sensations, urges or feelings to see what is common and what is less so. You cannot test and compare it in the same way as you can measure your running speed or vision. There are no precise markers. No amount of study can put you in someone else's shoes, inside their mind and body to get a true grasp of the comparison of their perspective and yours. Our perception of ourselves is so different to what we imagine it to be. People don't see us the way we see ourselves. We also gain new insights as time passes. What we took as normal before, seem bizarre now.

Quite often there is a magical upside to being what we might call, abnormal. We may have a special capability not necessarily a

prosaic ability to recall a sequence of playing cards or memorise innumerable facts and figures, something else instead. Many people regarded as geniuses have significant character flaws. They act oddly with eccentricity running in parallel to their brilliance.

Learning the skills to operate in a demanding, complex world is hard work. Rather than putting in that hard work we find an excuse to hide our laziness. The excuse is a label. A supposed clinical reason to get a free pass and avoid being on a level playing field with the rest. People learn to read at different rates. Those that struggle may not have a disability. They simply lack the reading practice. The more practice they get, the less they mix letters and words up.

When we get it wrong

I have made countless mistakes. I have said things that might have been a little hurtful or patronising or just not clever. Whether the people in question took that much offence and remembered it as vividly as me, I am not sure. These memories come back time and time again with far more presence than all the nice, kind empathetic things that I was a part of. Dwelling upon these trivial events serves no real purpose. Sometimes we use these experiences to modify our ways though. We may try to behave better in future encounters - furrowing kudos in our wake.

When I have made a mistake, apologising helped the situation considerably. That I assume would be obvious, but many fail to understand that an apology is a process. It is a process where you listen first. You listen to find out what you have done wrong. Get to understand the hurt you have caused. Fact find, fully, then and only then say sorry. People can be too quick to blurt out an apology before they took the time to listen to someone's grievance. Get to the bottom of the complaint then say sorry.

I have been in some situations where people have become a little offish. I have then been in a bit of a dilemma as to what to do. I could broach the subject and find out what, or even if, I have done something wrong or just leave it be and stay out of their way. In some cases, there might not seem much point doing anything as the awkwardness won't be for long. Sailing. Me at the helm. During the docking, a go around was called. I pushed the throttle forward creating a significant wave. Anarchy ensued. In an aeroplane I was accustomed to hitting the throttle, instantly. The procedure is thus, set full power, climb out and circle around to attempt another landing. However, putting the pedal to the metal in a cramped seaport is not appreciated by others there. It didn't help that there were three or four people shouting, yelling out what they each wanted me to do. I noticed that on account of all this, someone was becoming rather distant, and I made the effort

to sort it out. In this case I made an apology straight off which may not have been necessary, especially as I will be going home soon. Once they understood that a go around can give rise to an instinctive response to a pilot, they were quite jolly about it. The change in atmosphere was immediate.

Some take the ignoring route. They avoid contact when the situation can be remedied so easily by being humble. I see people play the long game as they know they are in the right and wait for an impasse to come about to prove themselves correct. This is all very well, but you can spend days or weeks with discomfort. Undoubtedly there are countless other tactics but head on - apologising if required is so powerful. Forgetting any pride and using humility gets people onside. I prefer not to have things festering because it becomes a bane to me. I could miss out on more than what the other party would. The world is full of millions of permutations and so many different situations arise, but I find that there are occasions where there is no point being seen to be right all the while.

I had a break-in. Stock was damaged by water that came in through the hole in the roof. During the clean-up we left some of the refuse by a bin across the road. Some days later I had a call from the authorities saying that they had someone prepared to stand up in court and testify that I had left some rubbish by the bin. With all the work dealing with the damage done to the property, I had completely forgotten about it. They could have given me a call or came over to see me about it but decided instead to go straight into a formal complaint with the authorities. I cleared up the bags and then went to confront the person who had reported me. They appeared to be bracing themselves for a stream of words, stating my displeasure at what they had done. Rather than showing my displeasure I explained that I had had a break-in and apologised for leaving the bags there. I felt that I didn't want an enemy of sorts on my doorstep. I think it is better to be cordial with everyone, even if a reader would see such an example as this as being rather righteous. I can also point out that as far as I can tell, no matter how bad things get for you, everyone else wants to live their life unaffected. It is worth repeating this. No matter how grim things become for you, people only care about how things affect them. People will indeed help, campaign, protest on behalf of others, but only if there is something in it for them. The selfishness drive, my friends.

Mentality

We are all mad. Try to prove you are not mad and people will really think you are a nutter. Whether we are deemed crazy or not depends on people's opinion. Some will think so, others won't. People have compiled a list of potential defects of the mind. The list is so long it fills a large tome big enough to make a dictionary seem like a pamphlet. We each have a most varied upbringing. So many cause and effects. Scintillating random chaotic events that produce individuality and cause to categorise suboptimal behaviour. Some will class it as suboptimal. Some will class it as something that needs addressing. Some see it as beneficial. Morality is opinion. It also a matter of opinion whether a mental condition needs to be rectified or not. Lots will gauge it differently. This was demonstrated with an experiment in madness detection.

Students were sent to psychiatric hospitals. They were all told to complain of a knocking sound in their head. All were committed and held captive in the wards. They came clean. They were not released. The doctors thought they must be mad if they came to the hospital pretending to have a problem. The only way they could get out and back into the world was by admitting that they had a problem and would accept treatment. Over the following days the student said that they were getting better, satisfying the doctors of the eligibility to go home. When news of this was published it caused outrage and shock. How could this be. The story did not end there. A year later the professor who sent these students out in this experiment got a phone call. "Ha-ha, we have another one of your students here!". The professor replied, "I haven't sent any more". It demonstrated that mental conditions are difficult to diagnose. It also speaks about pride. The doctors were happy to release them on the basis that their treatments had worked.

Mental conditions can be debilitating, or they can be a nuisance in the same way as tinnitus can be a little ringing in the ear or something that drives people to distraction. The radio in your car may get stuck on mute but that doesn't prevent you from driving the car like a puncture would. A bit more limiting would be a car with jammed windscreen wipers. You can't drive safely when it is raining. Your ability to drive your car depends on the rain, an external factor. We have mental issues that we ignore, issues we contend with, issues that bother us and things that stop us in our tracks. Sometimes we have to dismantle the car to find the fault, then put it back together to get going again. Whilst taking our thoughts apart can shatter our pride, damage our ego, or smash our self-belief, taking our thoughts apart can be remarkably

positive. A puncture is a tiny hole in an otherwise fine tyre. One small change in perception can be life altering. We spend years not knowing, not realising, not understanding that we have nothing more than something equivalent to a puncture in our mind. It can be easily fixed. If we want to fix ourselves that is. Call it what you will, fix, enhance, change. The mind is malleable. With a little work, you can improve the state of your mind.

Is your problem different, more complex, unlike problems others have? It may seem so but in truth it is a mere variant of a common issue and curable as any other.

Phobias

A date, a speech, a theatrical performance, all have one thing in common. Opportunity. An opportunity that we don't want to waste. An opportunity that can be somewhat exciting. Excitement can feel like anxiety and brushed off as just that. If it is just excitement, then we don't have to worry or obsess about it. However, we do get obsessed, most alarmed, and disquieted by things. The cure is pushing ahead and forcing yourself to go on a date, onto the stage or up to the front and begin speaking. Your nerves will jangle making your whole body react. The more often you push yourself into those uncomfortable situations the easier it becomes. Nerves give way to enjoyment. We learn to love the attention.

Many of us find workarounds rather than tackle the problem head on. We can become quite adept at doing so. We find ways to avoid confronting our fears. It is understandable given the hideous feeling in the pit of your stomach, real pain, and a true clenching acidic sensation that we get. It is not just a mental foible. These experiences, mighty unpleasant experiences become one big reason to shy away and come up with excuses to steer clear of something.

Look up at the ceiling, it is a ceiling, a limit to how high you can go in the room you are in. Anxiety has a ceiling too. It feels as though the amount of anxiety we can have is unlimited, but it is not. Anxiety builds and we want to get it back down as quickly as we can. We rarely take our anxiety to the maximum possible. To overcome the problem, we may have to. Once you realise that there is a limit to how much anxiety you can feel, you can start to tackle it. It is just a case of taking yourself up to that maximum, experiencing it and coping with it. As you approach the anxiety inducing issue, the level of anxiety will rise and rise, but it will always peak and then go down. When people pull away before they reach the peak, they don't get to overcome the problem. The worst part of the process is at the start. Each time you face the issue it gets easier. Much easier. You don't experience that

maximum level each time. The level will go up, but not by the same amount. Hence, why the first step is the hardest.

We can have phobias relating to dogs, spiders, public speaking, heights, small spaces, crowds. Untold things. There is often a trigger, an identifiable day or set of events that brought on the phobia. Worrying about how it began is not relevant. Wanting to be un-pestered, unperturbed, and unrestricted by it from now on, is. Though you may cast your mind back to times where you were locked in a small cupboard and that initiated fears of claustrophobic tight spaces. The past is the past.

Are you ready to face your fears? Are you fed up with the impact it is having on your daily life? If so then you can kill off your anxiety through a simple step-by-step process. If you were fearful of spiders for example, then the first task is to view a picture of one. As you study the picture your anxiety level will rise, until it reaches a maximum. It will then gradually tail off. You will soon discover that the anxiety, whilst not pleasant, doesn't harm you. The next step would be to look at a true living spider. Firstly, from a distance. Allow the anxiety to build up once again. After a few minutes the anxiety will die down. Get closer to the creature and once again watch your anxiety rise then fall. It won't be long before you are reasonably comfortable picking one up. Your mind gets rewired, and you become virtually free of the phobia. You may never get to like spiders, but you will become much less afraid of them. There may be some benefit from tapping parts of your hand or head during the worst of the anxiety as this can help refocus. Any method that you try needs to be repeated quite a few times, some phobias are not sorted overnight.

Are you checking something endlessly, worried that something will go badly wrong if you haven't performed a ritual? After hours of therapy one word sticks out: maybe. Maybe it will go bad, maybe it won't. Maybe it is not your fault. Maybe you can deal with the consequences. If you fall ill, most likely you won't, but maybe you will recover soon after. If someone breaks in, you will sort the mess and maybe it won't be so tragic after all. Bad things can happen. Bad things might happen. Maybe. The chances of something bad happening might be slim but can't be ruled out. That will always be true but maybe what you are doing in the belief that they will prevent bad outcomes is making it worse. Maybe reducing your behaviours might lower the danger.

It doesn't take much to spot the children who are still learning to swim, they will be the ones standing in the pool with dry hair. Chucking someone in at the deep end might seem like a fun way to get them to swim, but it can create an aversion to water and deter people from swimming forever. Oddly, the best place to learn the basics is not in a pool, but in the bath or with a big bowl

of water. Overcoming a fear of water is handy if your boat submerges. Besides that, swimming is a popular pastime. Follow these steps. Move on when you are comfortable with each step.

1. Hold your nose, close your eyes, and put your whole face into the bowl of water. Repeat a few times.

2. Take a deep breath, eyes closed and hold one side of your nose breathing out slowly and then submerge. Repeat a few times.

3. Take a deep breath, eyes closed not holding your nose at all - then submerge, breathing out slowly. Repeat a few times.

The aim is to overcome the fear of water entering your nose and having an unpleasant drink. Keep practising until you can manage to exhale into the water for 30 seconds. Avoid the temptation to open your eyes when you lift your head out of the water. Wipe away as much water as you can first. Say to yourself 'don't panic', wipe, then open your eyes. Chlorine in a pool can make them sting a bit but much less so if you take your time, wait a few seconds, wipe your face properly before you open your eyes.

Now you are ready to try it out in the pool or the sea. You may find yourself swimming underwater easier at first than on the surface, but the ability to submerge yourself is pivotal. Go through all these steps again standing up. Then take a swim of sorts. Stand up, wipe eyes and repeat. All the strokes, leg work, efficiency and so on can be worked on later.

I managed to coax huge strapping lads in Africa to swim in under thirty minutes. They had not been anywhere near water before and were somewhat wary. I used the same techniques on some youngsters, including my own in the hot tub. Had I known about this method when younger myself, I would not have spent hours and hours with rings and floats never progressing much.

Visualisation

A bad memory can stick out ten times more than a good one. Bad memories can be very troublesome. They can haunt us. Thankfully, there is a way to deal with them. Some have triggers. Some just keep playing with no specific cause. If only we can forget things - forget what we do not want to remember. You cannot wipe memories at will. However, you can dampen the horribleness of them to a point where they no longer bother you. Bad memories can be dealt with. Anyone with the right know how can deal with them. To all intents and purposes they become as good as erased.

Memories are nothing more than links. One thing linking to another. Sometimes lots of links making a stronger more pronounced memory. If memories are indeed just links, then it must be possible to change those links. If we change the links a

memory will fade. It remains in place for a while but is not linked to anything or if still linked then those links will be weak. To get a memory we don't want to fade away from our conscious we need only re-route some memory cells.

The fork in the road method is used to quell a bad memory. You create the fork in the road and mentally go down the new road each time the bad memory comes to the fore. The troublesome road in your mind at present will contain a nasty part – the part that causes you the most consternation/anguish. Firstly, create the new road. Think of a sequence that is nice. The sequence can be anything that gives you pleasure, enjoyment, or is simply peaceful. You choose. That sequence needs to be ten to fifteen seconds long. A scenario maybe. A memory of a walk. Something romantic or sexual in nature. Anything that your mind can think about that takes at least ten seconds to complete. When the unwanted memory comes into your mind, switch to this new road. Force yourself to dwell on this new thought path and go through the entire sequence.

The troublesome thought begins, you divert before the nasty part and play out the new sequence at that point. You need to do this over and over, 20, 30, 40 times dwelling on the nice thoughts at the end. Whatever the trigger, be it a time of the day, a smell, or the mere mention of a certain word, you run your thoughts down the line and break off to a new imaginary world. Each time it is set off you run it through to this different outcome. Over time the whole escapade fades and you don't voyage deep into the nicer parts. The triggers don't have the ill effect anymore. So long as the process is repeated every time, the issue can subside within a matter of days or at worst a month or so depending on the severity.

Some people hate the sight of shit. Confronting some unexpectedly in a toilet can be disturbing. Re-enter the bathroom in your mind and visualise a nice clean flushed pan. Then visualise coming out and meeting a nice person. Take a good look at a clean toilet bowl. Remember it. Visualise it, then dwell on the interaction with the person in any way you see fit. Memories can fade on their own over time, but this process accelerates it considerably. Ugly is replaced with beauty in the thought streams. Injuries are displaced by a picture of a healed-up individual. Repeat these simple diversions every single time the unwanted memory gets your attention. The diversions will eradicate the horrid unwelcome thoughts soon enough. Pick something in life that you like a lot, then dwell upon various aspects of it for a good ten to fifteen seconds each time the bad thought gets your attention. The moment that unwanted thought pops into your

head, cast your mind onto the nice though path. Run it through for as long as you can.

You have a body with a mind. That mind is nothing more than a sponge of links. Links that are strong make habit pathways. Good habits; experience. Not so good ones, your potential downfall. You can get rid of bad memories; you can adjust undesirable habits. Change the links, change the behaviour. Rather than thinking, habits may need doing instead. The paths lead somewhere. They lead to reward. On the way to reward we get excitement and expectation of reward. Thus, we change the end point. We need to do all but receive the reward to curtail the compulsion. No reward, no expectation of reward. No reward at the end leads to disappointment. So, we can use an active disappointment strategy to lessen the temptation of gambling, gaming and drug taking.

When something becomes a destructive aspect of your life instead of an acceptable vice, a less mental and more physical enactment is used. Drug taking involves preparation. During the preparation the excitement and expectation builds. Unpacking, sorting, heating, mixing, and loading a syringe are steps that precede the reward. The addict will be encouraged to go through these steps and stop at the point of injection. They will do this over and over. They will notice their intense feeling of anticipation rise dramatically when doing so. However, as they become accustomed to not receiving the powerful reward, these notions of anticipation diminish a little each time. It dampens the associated feelings of expectancy when they see other users or encounter the drug in their environment. Reminders are everywhere. Reminders that lead the addict through the thought process towards the reward. By taking the end point away those reminders stop being a problem. Quit smoking adverts were shown to be counter productive. They simply reminded smokers that they are due a cigarette. Weaning someone off an addictive substance can work too. Lowering the end point, lowering the reward to a point of no reward.

People have tried a tactic; make them get bored by it. This tends to fail. Gambling addicts have been placed in front of a betting machine for hours on end hoping that the sheer monotony will dissuade them. It doesn't work. Making them go up to the machine, but not bet, over and over is more productive.

They say you can have too much of a good thing. When we find something is becoming more of a bad habit than a reasonable pleasure, we can begin to worry and consider doing something about it. Some will go too far the other way. Seeing themselves a little unfit they go straight into marathon running rather ditching the car and walking to work instead. If you find yourself doing

something to excess, it doesn't mean you have to give it up completely. Cut back maybe. Be happy. Managing without may need a coping strategy. People find a distraction and allow the time to pass, seeing if they can keep their mind off the issue for an hour at a time. Don't be fooled though. You can find yourself giving up on so much that life becomes pleasure free. It would be rather annoying if you make every effort to do the right thing, you conform to satisfy those in your circle of influence, you iron out your many defects then get struck by lightning. Killed with everything in place that marked you as a success.

Sense it

Onstage he had thousands of adoring fans, some screaming, many fawning, many singing along to the lyrics. When he decided to give busking a go to see what would happen, most people walked on by paying him no attention whatsoever. We assume a busker is just a busker. Context is all. It takes razzmatazz for us to believe. A famous person is a nobody that is known by no end of nobodies. If you spend ten times as much on a meal as you normally do, is it ten times better? Is the same meal with different people quite different?

Stale popcorn has been given to moviegoers. No complaints were made because people's focus was primarily on the film. When we do home in on what we have in our hands we can be so much more critical and sometimes feel a duty to be complimentary too. It is quite a marvellous thing, being switched on to what is around you. Appreciating the qualities of the here and now. Some are only satisfied with perfection and rarely enjoy what something is as it is.

A mundane afternoon wandering around the shops can be turned into an entertaining experience. It might be a cold day with light drizzle, not to your liking, but you can enjoy the freshness, the difference, the change felt by your senses. You can actively revel in each moment. Try talking to as many people as possible, purely for the experience, as an experiment. If you lack the daring, think about how lucky you are. Lucky that you are not unwell, lucky that you can walk. Make the effort to talk to the shelf stacker, say hello to the people waiting at the bus stop, talk to as many people as you can. You might get an odd reaction at times, but you won't be an anonymous figure that day. Never let one miserable person spoil the party. There is no need to transform yourself into the local crazy one. Remember, people can feel invisible doing a mundane job and generally appreciate the interaction.

Another little game people play when at a party or gathering is to approach the dullest looking person and see if they can find out something interesting about them. If not the dullest then maybe someone who appears posh or brash. You may find that the

upper-class demeanour doesn't run too deep and behind the loud exhibition is someone full of life and energy. There can be more to someone's story than what we assume from the early impression we get of them. Getting to know someone a little and listening to them changes your overall interpretation of the people of this world. Just being alive is enough to interact as you see fit.

Problems can be our salvation. Problems can provide the inspiration and impetus to set forth on a new challenge. More awkward and unforeseen problems that we come across can test our individual character. When things don't pan out the way we want, some people become het up whilst others simply take advantage of their situation. When held up by a late arriving train an opportunity arises to compare notes with those in the same boat. Some delayed in traffic use the time to have a little think. This is easier said than done though if the pressures of work mean that the knock-on effect is costly. We can't all reconfigure our lives as easily as others to reduce the weight on our shoulders. However, it can be factored into our decisions about what we take on.

Being human entails letting off steam sometimes. A punch bag set up in the garden provides an outlet for pent up anger, so use it. When you are annoyed with someone, you can yell at them at the top of your voice. You can also yell 'at them' at the top of your voice somewhere private where no one can hear. Reel off what you want to say. Reel it off frequently on your own somewhere. As you continue to vent, the anger can fade. Vocalize it, get it out of you. Then if you do confront that person, you can tell them about your gripes in a calm manner. Alternatively, we can ask ourselves what we want. What would solve the problem? Plot and plan a solution. Bad people often win short term. To obtain what you truly want, niceties prevail.

Conserve your energy for the fights that aid your cause. It is tempting to hold everyone to account, but who will win? Some have endless drama in their lives. They are adept at magnifying the importance of trivial things. They will make a minor transgression seem like a major infraction. They want to glean sympathy and attention to enhance their gravitas. These know how to ply their tradecraft and draw people into their sticky web. Some of the most fluffy, soft, and outwardly pleasant people in your midst use cutting remarks to slay your progress. They are masters of manipulation. Many were dealt the best hand in life. They have sailed through. They got lots of attention in the years gone by and are addicted to self-relevance. They get under your skin, dwelling in your mind for far too long. They will not support

you. They will not stand by and be neutral. They will slyly impede your progress. Let go.

Onerous

What puts you off starting something? What puts you off carrying on with something? People think about that last time they went and ask if they felt better for going last time. No stalling, they just go. People with mountains to move aren't daunted by the scale of the task. They tune out and get on with it. Some like to get the whole job done in one day. Others break the job down and do it bit by bit. A little each day until completion. A job half done is much easier to complete. If you are procrastinating, ask yourself, will I feel better if I get at least some of this done?

Some sit about waiting for things to happen like a farmer hoping for rain. It usually does rain, but we can't be sure. Others make a solid effort to irrigate the land by getting water from somewhere else. You can meander through your life if you want to, hoping for something fortunate to happen, but those that thrive take positive steps to help themselves. Progress rarely comes easy. It takes a lot of shovelling. Lots of false starts. There will be times where you take the wrong path and accept that that is progress in itself. It may not be until after you fail and fail again that you begin to get it right. If there are five ways of doing something, then on the balance of probabilities, you won't find the best one first. Once you have tried two or three, you then realise that there are even more than five, but each dead end is one idea killed off.

Someone I knew analysed a tiny irritant in her life, namely the chore of ironing. She realised what it was that made her dislike doing it so much. It wasn't the ironing itself; it was the hassle of unpacking the iron and setting the ironing board up each time. The solution was simple. She stopped putting the ironing board away. She left the board up, ready to be used when needed. This anecdote is trivial and trite compared with the struggles felt by people in some places yet makes a significant point. Isolate the part that deters you. Find a resolution. I have only used an iron to transfer stickers, but I too like certain tools and equipment ready to roll - all plugged in and without piles of junk atop. With everything having a set place, thereby easy to find, I am not put off by having to clear the mess and faff about before getting a job underway. It must have stemmed from life growing up where there was never the right stuff to do what I wanted, just rusty rubbish that left you hours out of pocket and deeply frustrated.

While some delay tackling jobs around the house. Others shy away from going somewhere because they don't want to face the uncomfortable journey. We put up with it in our youth but now the sufferance is harder to bear. More favourable travel times, more spacious seating arrangements help. Comfort is an odd

beast. Many forms of discomfort are temporary - a few hours or so with no lasting damage to our body. The torture of a trip maybe transient, but that is not the point. It is the dread prior that gives us the will to find ways out of it. Do you need to suffer a bit from time to time to appreciate your comforts? Maybe, but commuting every day amongst so many self-absorbed people is grim. You find yourself becoming less and less graceful by the month. This can lead to rethinking the virtue of an otherwise wonderful job. It can make the idea of working somewhere closer to home much more attractive. You can use mentality to overcome the hate of it for sure. One may switch off during the pain and reconcile it with it being the means to an end whereby greater wealth down the line will free you from this, hopefully, eventually.

The opportunity of going on safari came about. Upon seeing other people set off in mini vans and return hot and visibly worse for wear, we made a decision. Enduring never ending bumpy roads is made far worse when you are in a cramped seat. Too dangerous they said but swapping one danger for another transformed a nightmare into some of the best few days ever. By hiring our own tank type jeep, we could stop where and when we wanted. We had the best seats in the vicinity. I could also educate my partner on her driving habits. I got her to see the benefit of going around the holes in the road rather than through them all the time.

Misconception

We don't grow out of copying others; we just change who we copy. People take gossip at face value. Our friends say swilling anything up to ten drinks in one night is normal. Five or six times a week too. Survey says, the average is three - once or twice per week. If you are aware of the average, the real average rather than the perceived amount you have more confidence to drink an amount that you are happy with.

Our friends give the impression that most people are having sex at this age. Surveys say, less than ten percent have lost their virginity by that time. Discovering the truth is reassuring. We find that we are not the odd one out. It is the minority not the majority that are having sex at an early age. Not only can we seek the truth from a reliable source, but also find the belief, the faith, the reason to stick to what we are ready for. Seek truth over hearsay.

Missing out? Are you really? People are good at making it seem as though you are missing out. Peoples' lives are rarely continuous exciting fun. It more likely to be nothing nothing nothing nothing party nothing nothing. Or they are wrapped up in a tiring exacting existence.

The clique paradigm. People need to give outsiders occasional access to their events. How else can they show the excluded how great their group is. They want you there and don't want you there. They let you in occasionally to show you. Are you missing out when you don't know what you are missing out on? This ignorance paradox is found in group dynamics frequently. I keep myself in ignorance of their matters. I revel in good times with people that I like.

Bully, bully, bully. The bullies learn their craft at an early age and bully until they die. It is nice to see them die. Hopefully, god will burn all their skin off and replace it with a new one, ad infinitum. In the meantime, you find yourself outnumbered. They enlist others to join in the bullying. Unity before reason. The counter is nothing other than to stay cheerful and work on people one at a time until it all unravels. I say it is nice to see them die, but in some ways, it is as nice to see them live an extended existence, lonely isolated frustrated, dejected. Bullies are never content.

Boldness

With brazen assertive boldness a trickster will enter a building and pass through any security in place with the same posture as one who has legitimate access. If you walk inside, neither wary nor coy, you are much less likely to be challenged. There will be times in life where this can be employed to great effect, not to break any law as such but to get around some bureaucracy of one sort or another. As a humble soul in charge, we need to be suspicious of bold individuals if we want to avoid being cheated.

Victims dither - to avoid being one, you can make yourself appear that you know what you are doing and where you are going, rather than looking lost and vulnerable. Walk with purpose.

You can't fight the whole world. Sooner or later, someone will defeat you; fatally. When in danger, one can resort to acting a little crazy, demented, to confuse the situation giving you vital time to slip away. Wave your hands in the air and make strange noises. Do you want an epitaph of bravado or play some more days of your life unharmed. There are many stories of warfare where only the cowards came home. The cowards let people know the fate of the rest. If you have too many cowards in your army you will lose, but too much confidence and not enough respect for what can go wrong can wipe out people in their prime. We worry too much about the tiny number that will view us as a cowardly chicken. We might do better worrying about a getting a permanent scar on our face which everyone will see.

Opportunities are lost not for the lack of chance, but for the reluctance to have the nerve to ask. A friend of mine saw a motorcycle left outside a neighbour's house, unused and

neglected. With a little care and attention, it would have been ideal for restoration. When it went, he asked the neighbour what they had done with it. He found to his despair that it was dumped. Had he asked beforehand the neighbour would have given it to him for free to get it off their hands. In the same way as braving the request for a date with a someone you fancy, a promising looking soul, we know that in most instances the worst-case scenario is that we get a blunt no. Fortune favours the brave is a good cliché and wasted chances litter our lives.

Despots have proposed becoming an eternal leader years before making it a reality. Try sliding in a suggestion about getting married on a first date. We can broach ideas that appear preposterous and crazy. Some suggestions seem preposterous at first. However, little by little preposterous ideas begin to be taken seriously. Ridiculous to reality by seeding an idea and making people believe.

Many will shy away from asking too many direct questions, too intrusive, far too probing they think but it is not a great surprise that people respond positively when put on the spot. This is because most like nothing better than talking about themselves. Caution is required when being direct and a good sense of when someone feels awkward. If unsure, I ask if they feel comfortable talking about the subject in question and change course where applicable. Confrontational, head-on discussions brought me results - insights into numerous avenues of thoughts. Two primary devices are used, one is resisting jumping in, and the other is repeating the question or a variation of it several times. Having the audacity to wait for a response. Saying nothing whilst keeping eyeballs transfixed, yours, and theirs, will elicit more than mere gabber. If I am not getting the result I want, I rephrase and reapply the pressure appealing for more information. If all else fails, I might show disinterest banking on them wanting more attention. Sincerity and the ability to maintain some confidentiality is important to me with any of this. I like prying, lots of us do. Whilst it is prying and being nosy, it can be helpful. Couples don't always broach certain subjects with one another. An outside force can bring things out into the open and encourage some helpful reflection. Some things are not always talked about at home. They lay there bubbling just under the surface. An outsider prying can help them come to the fore.

Completeness

The trap of completeness is quite pervasive. We want to get the whole set. Sometimes the set will be outlined by nature, but in most cases, it is some organisation or person that devised it. We want to read every book by an author, store each bank note issued by a nation or note down every type of animal within a

category that we spot on our travels. People will try most hard to complete a series of one sort or another. They do so without paying much regard to the real reason behind it, they just want the full set. I recall a friend going to the shop every day to buy some more stickers to fill an album. The hunt for the last few became quite expensive - for the parents that is. When it finally was complete the album was tossed aside.

Sporty types want to traverse every crevasse in every land just to get an 'official' record. They do so forgetting that someone else, a person, made up the qualifying rules that they adhere to. Many will undoubtedly enjoy the pursuit, the climbing, and the test of endurance. However, the justification of counting it as a success or not is on someone else's terms. A clever company can capitalize on all of this by making a bunch of objects that plays on completism. They will issue smaller quantities of one type to induce a sense of rarity and more scrambling for them. Completism is a gremlin in the workings of the mind that lies in conjunction with the parallel power of this curiosity and reward. We are compelled to fill in those pervasive gaps that our inquisitiveness affords us. It gets us out and about and provides a focus so maybe we ought to avoid sneering too much.

Tactics

Have you ever got good at something then lost to a complete novice? Did you lose because you took short cuts hoping for a quick win. Did you go against your normal tried and tested tactics that produce reliable results? You are in effect putting square wheels on your car knowing full well that they are just dreadful compared to round ones. Not using your experiences makes a mockery of learning a skill in the first place. People with stature are reliably boringly good at what they do. Their responses are considered. They act in keeping with their stature. Always. Highly regarded individuals pause before jumping in. Highly regarded individuals stick to solid tactics.

Many things can't be undone, chances are missed, opportunities lost, and cash misspent. We regret doing, we regret not doing. There will be once in a lifetime opportunities and things we do that are damaging beyond repair. However, some things we need not regret. We look at them as mistakes instead. Change the word regret to mistake and see how you look at the error then. It can turn what you have done into more of a positive. Seeing something as a mistake as something that we can learn from is helpful. When you change a regret into a mistake it can lead to a positive. We can choose to act differently next time. We can also spread the word and help others avoid making the same error. There is a subtle difference between a regret and a mistake. Dwell on the past or gain from mistakes made.

Your car has smoke belching out of it. You want to stop and argue, blame the person who forgot to check the oil. Perhaps one could put aside who is at fault for now, time is pressing. Handle it, deal with it. Look at what you have. What is the solution? How can we move forward? When things are back on the straight and narrow you can then reflect on why things turned ugly.

The best chess players, the best poker players focus their attention on what their opponents are up to. What are they planning. Countering their plans is as important as making plans of your own. We must need to adapt our strategy as the game plays out, changing things to suit our opponents. Each opponent will deploy a different strategy so you can't always use the same approach every time. Instead, you must adapt and change according to the individual situation. Adaptability is the key to success in many games.

In life, there is always a counter view. Nothing is concrete. There are different sides to every story. Things evolve. Some things are no longer applicable. The points you make today may no longer hold true tomorrow. Things that are important today can end up being less relevant as time goes by. We discover new ways of looking at things, overriding past ideas. They too are superseded. We trash old ideas and replace them with new ones. In later reflection, we see that both old and new ideas have some merit when tailored to suit the situation. We may say, in general, on the whole, as a way of accepting that it is difficult to make a factual statement that takes into account every possible variation.

We can spend days, week, years mulling over what we should do. What is for the best? Our life rumbles on regardless, imperfectly, with compromises. Flexibly. It has to. Life throws up many challenges and conundrums. You can debate for an eternity but when you are hungry you need to eat. Sooner or later, we need to pick an option.

Psychology presumptions

A few psychologists think they are clever by claiming some people are dumb stupid human beings with irrational traits. During the era of taxi drivers, before they were replaced by self-driving cars, some odd behaviour was observed. During the rainy days, some would quit work early. The rain brought plenty of customers in quick succession. Now, some would indeed capitalise on this and work all day making good money. The idiots would stop as soon as they earnt their normal daily target. But are they idiots? They may welcome those raining days as ones where they get to go home early and spend their afternoon under the covers with their partner. Maybe they could do a full day in the rain and have a sunny day off. Maybe the rain brings more jams and unpleasant driving conditions. Maybe we don't want to sit about waiting for

the heavens to open. Not everyone wants more money, not everyone cares about efficiency.

People selling dreams, selling houses are notoriously good at presenting a false image. Show the property when it is a glorious sunny day and at a time when there is less traffic building up on the road outside. If you do not care about your credibility, if you care nothing for being genuine then persuade, prod, coax at will. We can get people to do what we want by ignoring what they want. We know best, they are impressionable. I take all this back if a first aid kit is made in such a way that mistakes are avoided, and it does the job super well. The design guides us. That is all fine but ulterior motives are for skunks. People find ingenious uses for little-by-little coaxing to make the world glide more effortlessly. Psychological tricks get adopted by greater numbers until there is a backlash. I am one of the many that object at the outset and dismayed by those that get carried along without making a fuss. Small forces add up to a large muscle working against the individual who wants to be freer.

What is the most common mistake amateur psychologists make? They make one observation and read too much into it. One observation is not a lot. Seeing someone do a similar thing twice gives you a 50/50 chance of being right. Three times and you can put money on it. Someone arrived on holiday with a bruised black eye. Apparently, they fell over a pushchair. We take their word for it. A few days later their partner stood up and apologised for their regular lateness and made a point of saying that it was their fault and not their partners. Now we are 50/50 that a punch was thrown. Then there was a third piece of evidence. On the last day, the victim stumbled over to us and said "Jason, is not so bad really". Now I am beyond certain. Make the initial observation, gather more and more evidence, but keep your mouth shut until you have at least 3 items that concur with your suspicion.

Evidence is your saviour. What evidence have you got? Have you checked to make sure what they are saying is true? Evidence is not to be sought to confirm a belief, a belief that you have already decided upon. Evidence must be considered that runs counter to that belief. Due diligence, check with the person involved first to verify the claims. Due diligence saves a fortune in time and embarrassment. An assumption might be right, but it is not evidence.

A knife can be used for cooking or stabbing someone. For good or bad. Psychology can be used to help someone or to manipulate and take advantage of them. You can make someone seem crazy and unsure of themselves. You can make them doubt their reality. That is using a knife to stab. You can make someone feel crazy for not trying, not giving something a go. You can heal with the same

psychology tool. Look at the intentions. The intentions are what matters. Even if someone is rather clumsy with that knife, they may have meant to do good. They may have been clumsy but wanted to cook you a good meal in effect. All psychological ploys can be used to good or bad effect depending on the intentions of those deploying them.

A swindler, a hustler, a chancer, swindles, hustles, and chances by emulating someone genuine and decent. We learn to avoid bad types by examining people's traits. However, a good person will behave in a very similar fashion to a cheater, because the cheater is trying to copy a good person in all but intent. Imagine you have never been abroad, and someone offers you the chance to go exploring somewhere far flung and amazing. This would seem excessive and over indulgent to you. The offer chimes with warning signs that you have read about. You have not been abroad, but the person has been abroad more times than you have had hot dinners. It is clumsy. They have not thought about it much from your point of view. From the perspective of the person making the offer, a marvellous trip abroad is not a big deal. They are accustomed to widespread travel whilst you are not. It is one piece of evidence, not enough to make any fair judgements. It is simply a kind offer which you reject because of your amateurishness in psychology. Psychology is relative. It relative to the person and their circumstances.

You obey an instruction to write a 1000-word essay on the qualities and uses of a vegetable. You were allowed to choose any vegetable to write about. You select tomato. You write with prowess and precision. Your essay is detailed and worthy of a good mark. The invigilator assesses it for rigour and accuracy. Not only do you receive a score of zero, but no explanation is given for why you are given zero. You recheck what you submitted and fail to understand what is wrong. Psychology is very much like this. We make assertions, we come to conclusions and have great cause to think we are right. A tomato is classified as a fruit. We got the base premise wrong. We think we understand someone as we look at what we are presented with but fail to spot the base premise upon which we have made all our assertions.

Me the judge and jury

I have not met a single soul that hasn't made erroneous judgments about others. I have not met a single soul that has not made *more* erroneous judgements than valid ones. Emblazoned upon his back in the small town of the small island named Curacao were the words "Don't judge me". I never had the gall to ask him about it. Perhaps he has suffered what I have, what most of us have. Judgement, those judgements made without bothering to find out enough to make such judgements. We may need to work

out quickly whether someone is friend or foe. For this we use visible cues and make judgments using innate evolutionary skills. These aid our survival. Other judgments aid our ego. I dare you to ask more before you criticize, before you condemn, before you utter words full of sardonicism.

Judgements are one of the many bad things we do. We are all bad. We are all selfish, spiteful, and mean to others at times. We assume, judge then without much thought, moralise. We might believe our moralising is correct and for the greater good. If we put more thought into it, if we asked more questions, we may get to see the full picture and make much better judgements. This brings together the ideas contained in the section Choice. Namely the bigger the fretwork on one side of the argument the more chance a decision falls that way. The more information you have, the better the decision will be for all concerned.

There is a first mover advantage. The person who makes the initial complaint gets heard fully. The victim of the facile complaint will be on the backfoot and not heard. We want to believe the complainant. We don't want the effort of getting all the facts straight. We don't want to back down when we realize that our judgement was not fair and reasonable. This stems from the way our mind operates. The complaint is the centre node. All the information radiates from it. No one likes taking that central node away as that means rearranging hundreds of links in their head. Countering false accusations based on judgments and hearsay is a tough task. When someone believes in the worst about you, you can simply ask whether they really believe the claims and leave it at that. "Do you really believe that?" Too much time is devoured and lost trying to convince people that you are innocent of feckless accusations.

How many of us need to prove ourselves before being taken seriously. Prove ourselves not a danger. Prove ourselves worthy as the rest. Whilst some of us spend an eternity proving ourselves one way or another, the others get instant respect from appraisals based on fast judgements. Our appearance, our physicality, our posture, our display of wealth and success. Our image can cast a shadow of fear or a ray of belief that we are nice. Not all will judge us by our presentation alone for they have this generosity and willingness to assume we are an equal until proven otherwise.

I didn't feel a great deal of reverence. Nor was I looked upon with high regard, but I was made to feel liked. I was treated fairly. She looks everyone in the eyes rather than making some feel unworthy of their gaze. Two smiles in one day spoke volumes. One signalled wanting to be there, the other keenly wanting to do it. Generosity is coupled with non-judgmentalism.

Heresy

Some of us seek permission, others hand out permission. We can make people do all kinds of things by giving them permission. We follow social cues. We copy. We are reluctant to be the odd person out. We stick to convention until we are given permission to deviate. I decided that I would dance both left-handed and right-handed when everyone else stuck to right-handed only. I would also dance moves inverted. I would do the moves as if the follower were leading. To get others to try this I had to find a way of giving them permission to do it. If they feel that they are allowed, then they will push the boundaries. It takes bravery to be the one to try something different and then to encourage others to break ranks with the norm. You need to be tough and determined as people will frown and object. For a while that is, until you are proven right or wrong. You can be the one that gives permission to break out from what most believe is right and proper.

Perfection



Three cars, a jeep a racing car and an everyday runabout. Which one is perfect? Jeeps can go off road but topple over if cornering too fast. They are also heavy and cumbersome. Lots of clearance underneath the vehicle enables off-road use, but this raises the centre of gravity and undermines the stability. The racing car is the quickest by far, but hopeless for your shopping and gets stuck in the mud really badly. This means that you have a compromise with the cheapest and most practical for everyday needs and the only sensible place to race it is in a stock car smash up event. This analogy applies to us humans as well. Nobody is perfect, only perfect for the application.

I once bought a drill bit made of solid carbide which was some 20 times dearer than a standard one. Yes, it drills with ease, but I wouldn't lend it to anyone, not because it was so expensive but because it is brittle and easily broken if not used right. Each and everything has a negative. Never perfect for all circumstances irrespective of how much money they cost. Every change leads to a compromise; you improve something at the expense of something else.

Could a perfect human being be designed and created? Is it possible to make enhancements and eliminate present deficiencies without downsides? We are led to believe that sometime soon all the believers will be saved and returned to a perfect world in a perfect form. Not only would this paradise be ten times more hellish than the world now, but every step you take, everything you do will be mistake and error free. No ladder you climb will fail, no cars will crash, and no fun will there be had. An intelligence so great that those fortunate few will be swamped in brilliance. No arguments, no discord, no chance to be yourself. The world is always going to be full of strife, there will always be risks, there will always be injustices and unfairness. Perfection is accepting downsides.

We humans are built for certain things. Each above average ability is coupled with weaknesses in other areas. The size of your blood vessels dictates whether you will be good at short fast races, great at long distance endurance challenges or best for sitting watching others compete for vain glory. If you think that we could invent a human being that can vary the size and shape of the various body parts, adjusting according to the demands of the day, then you will be perfectly suited for day dreaming competitions. Even our minds are configured to excel in different



ways and although there is a certain amount of plasticity, what gives on one hand takes on the other.

Dissent

To the dissenter Simon's success in life was all luck. Simon's popularity is misplaced, bought rather than earned. If Simon does some charitable work, then it will be deemed as something to make Simon look good. Everything Simon does shall be seen in a negative light. All positives are viewed with cynicism. Yet to most people Simon is seen as a decent sort.

One relatively small thing Simon does. One thing that Simon said. One thing taken the wrong way. One misinterpretation and dissent begins in earnest. Whether trivial or not, that thing will mar all else that Simon does. From then on, the dissenter questions why Simon should count more than me, why listen to Simon when my views should always take centre stage.

Of course, not everyone will see Simon as a saint. Some won't be in the least bit bothered by what Simon does, or doesn't do, or say. However, whereas the majority get on with their lives and just make pleasantries with Simon, the dissenter will try and turn and sway as many people as possible. A true dissenter will make it their life's work to defame and make Simon appear as bad as possible.

You the dissenter might decide that giving Simon a wide berth is not befitting you. Instead, you prefer to stir up maximum trouble, as much as you can with any means at your disposal. Nothing illegal or dastardly, but endless vocal action. You need to do this without compromising your own position. A starting point would be to spread some half-truths. Never give the full story as that will do the opposite of what you want to achieve. Most people who get the complete picture will see Simon in a good light.

Any story can be spun to make Simon seem disingenuous making him appear untrustworthy or make others want to disown him. Not only is the first story people hear believed, but it is invariably remembered most clearly. Even when the full facts have been uncovered there will still be an element of doubt in the air. Worse still, only a few that hear the rumours will be set straight. For example, Simon may have to be secretive not because of a desire to be sly, but because Simon has to protect somebody and avoid jeopardising a future event. A dissenter sees the discretion as bad form, but others will be fully understanding when they find out everything that is going on. Simon will still be marked out as a cagey type by those that didn't want to find out more and get all sides of the story.

You won't get everyone to go along with your line of reasoning, but that doesn't matter as long as the numbers grow. Some people can be swayed quite easily. It is quite common for people

to hastily change their view, but others will take much more persuasion. The point is to keep it going and going and rely on the adage of no smoke without fire and prevent Simon from dousing the nonsense with a cold bucket of truth.

When you are in the presence of Simon and he appears to be getting an audience, people are listening, intervene and say this is boring. Saying the topic is boring is a good way to halt the conversation or at least spoil the flow. Whether people are finding it boring or not is beside the point. They don't want to be seen listening to something that could be viewed as such.

When a new member joins a group, established members can feel a little threatened and dislike competition. This or one small thing that someone says or does can start the seed of descent. It builds relentlessly in the same way as a seed of curiosity does. Descent hinges on a key point being dislikeable. Certain aspects of Simon do not fit with our built-in preferences. It matters not one jot if the person whom you are gunning for is a laudable individual. All attributes are switched to negative. It goes further than some name calling and derogatory remarks. It is a long grind of disapproval. A dissenter will seek every avenue to find a justification for their probing and aggravation. They will try and get other people to agree with them, rallying more and more people to share in the attack.

A dissenter's food is obviously the reaction, but simply ignoring it is not always possible. Having the story half told and distorted becomes an irritation. Things of small interest are magnified far beyond what is worth any serious attention in the normal world. Milking something small and making it seem important is their primary tactic. Having hate in their heart will not bother them in the slightest. So, Simon needs a solution. He mustn't show annoyance, he needs to be careful in what he does to try and rectify the situation and avoid making it worse.

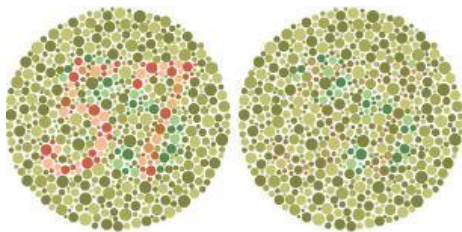
There are many card and board games where players can find a counter move for every play you try. And in life there will also be something you can do too, to counter what people are doing. One solid option is to embrace the dissenter, have them be your personal troll. Trolls boost your rankings and ratings. All great people will have a trolling dissenter and gather more as their ubiquity rises. Does poking fun in return make the situation worse? Does thanking them for their input help? As a subject of the nastiness can we maintain our composure. Do we simply put the record straight when it really matters, rather than bother to do so at each twist and turn. This can be hard, particularly when you do not even know who the perpetrator is. If it escalates and turns threatening it is harder still. Simon chose to take control, responding to



the avalanche of vitriol. However, Simon replied once a day – only once per day. Simon knew that ignoring the fool would not work. If Simon fed them nothing, they got hungry and more angry. As the days turned into weeks the single daily response melted the snow.

I gained a few trolls along the way for one simple reason. I told people the truth. The truth along with a solution can be most useful to them, but they did not like me for it. Hence why so many of us are inclined to tell white lies or keep their mouths shut.

We really do see things differently



People who are colour blind may look at these plates and not see the characters. This provides a parallel to how we do not all see the same as everyone else. Call it a deficiency, call it a different ability, but we are not wired the same to visualize everything in equal measure. It is therefore no surprise that we can be incapable of seeing things from other people's standpoint at times. It is not because we are awkward necessarily, but because our makeup prevents us from grasping the same things as everyone around us. Hence, we can argue for hours on end and never reach agreement. Our preferences are fixed, and this is the reason we are not always able to see eye to eye. We prefer things the way we like to do them. Nothing will change that.

Whilst the majority can see the characters in the circles, imagine trying to convince someone who has a deficiency that those characters are there. No amount of persuasion, no amount of truth telling could ever convince them completely. They either take your word for it or more often than not, refuse to believe it. They are configured to see what they see and perceive the world as it is to them. This can be why you can spend a lifetime hopelessly trying to change a person's position, change their political standpoint, or try to get them to see the good in someone.

I am the one

Oh, how grand it will be to be the one proven right all along with dissenters all around. It was your suggestion, your bravery to stick

your head above the parapet. You soothsay, expressing concern, lamenting what people are doing is wrong and know what can be improved. Nothing beats being vindicated and the only ones to spot the solution. Why is it that others can't see what you can? It seems to some as obvious and clear as day like those numerals on the plates above, but so many people just don't get it. Others must be wrong for I can't be mistaken. You were single minded and determined. You stopped following the herd and it was a dream come true to be proven correct all along.

Self-belief can pay dividends, but for each success story there are countless others that go to their grave convinced that they were right. Never were they able to reappraise nor consider they were wrong in any way. The dissenter wants to be that one brighter individual that proves to the world that they were justified in uncloaking the devil, preventing the target from getting away with something. We can have self-doubt and think that since something is supported by so many people, it must be right. There have been a few that marched on with an idea regardless of all the doubters and made changes for the benefit of others. They have increased our collective knowledge. However, some have an unbending mentality that creates a large distraction. Nothing was wrong. It need not have been brought to our attention if it was properly analysed before they made such a fuss.

The overwhelming majority of musicians have absolutely no chance of getting to the top of their profession, but they have belief as they see others attain worldwide acclaim with lesser works. This self-confidence is not restrained by any acknowledgement of their delusion or acceptance that random fortuitous luck is a big part of what propels the minority into the spotlight. It goes without saying that if you don't try then your chances are zero, but there is only a physically small space at the top. The more you try to fit in, the greater the dilution.

Rate, review and recommend

I recall going to a hotel where the location was good, the furnishing wild and new. I had nothing to complain about. That was until I opened the curtains and was faced with a wall. No window. For some that would be of little concern, but for me it was a case of finding somewhere else as early as possible the next day. Whether it is a hotel room, restaurant, or an item we buy, when a key ingredient is deficient it can become customary to pick holes in every other aspect of it. Other issues that would normally be a minor niggles now become something we vocally disapprove of. We begin to find fault in every corner. If the basics are right, we are more content to put up with other problems. Each of us will have our priorities and recommend to others based upon what we feel is most important.

People will push for what is more than a fair deal, irrespective of the long-term effects and who they deprive in the process. Principles before pragmatism. The dissent tips the balance and sets the tone of any appraisal we make of many things and many people. This will apply to political systems and policies made by governments in the same way. And the glorious thing is that nothing can be done about it as people are born differently and stuck with likes set in order like plates stacked upon one another, liking one thing above another over another.



The art of art is to attach a pretentious backstory to the items you present. The level of craftsmanship is not vital, though it can be appreciated by some. Novelty helps. However, no artwork contains much in the way of originality. It will be a minor twist on some other established concept, maybe a change in scale or new combination. These canvases have tag lines: #####

"The four dogs that personifies the throwing of light on what we can see when we pay attention to our surroundings."

"We have a negative use of colours to highlight the negativity in the human condition relating to dissent."

As a critic, you use as few words as possible. Dismal, fun or amateurish would suit the work above nicely. Similarly, when describing some wine, we can use battery acid, delicate or tart. People forget 99% of what we say. They might remember one apt word, so make it a good one.

Small Islands

What chance do you get to have your say on how things are run in your country, one vote every four or five years? We can voice our opinions and hope that those in charge will take heed of what we have to say. Aside from that there is little most can do. Those in a minority camp so often find themselves out voted in every election. They therefore have to either make do or get involved somehow in the political process to see any changes made in their favour. People that do get involved find themselves in endless meetings trying to get agreement. However, they are hindered by so many people having different ideas and the need to cater to the wide variety of demands of so many disparate people. The more attending the meeting the more you spot falling asleep. Endless intricacies of what to do are debated. Would it not be simpler on a small island without the sheer number of things to consider? This was what Ben put to three good friends, convincing them that a new start on their terms was possible. Hence the day came where four people left the modern world to embark upon a new life on an isolated island, looking to build something utopia-esque. Their chances may be slim, but optimism pervades. They now feel empowered to get things moving along in the direction of their pleasing.

As soon as they arrive, they all sit by the campfire and start discussing the details and planning what sort of community they are going to build.

Ben is always looking ahead, driven to try to find new ways of doing things, clutching to the concept of continuous improvement. Unlike Dave who likes to live by the day. Dave will only do things when it is absolutely necessary or to stop Claudia and Racheal nagging. Ben has these visions of not only getting lots of things off the ground but ensuring everything is as good as it can be with the limited resources available. They want their children to benefit from all their hard work. Dave feels that although there is an expectation that future generations won't have to make the same sacrifices, it will always be the next generation that benefits and never this one. Besides aspirations change and new problems replace old ones.

They debate the idea of a democracy, but Ben wants the problem of someone being regularly outvoted addressed. They are prone to major rancour and upset regarding some key issues with some becoming marginalised and pushed aside. There will always be the potential for three to override the concerns of the fourth. Despite the trap of too much talking and not enough doing, Ben still likes the notion of all sitting down and working things through

thereby getting agreement for everything of importance and everything trivial. So much for coming here to get away from long winded meetings. Racheal has seen this sort of thing before, working in organisations that have practices akin to this, with the aim of trying to keep everyone happy and discovered that the only thing that got done was a lot of talking. It is a nice virtuous idea in principle but rarely works for long in practice. Having one person in charge, preferably in turns, at least gets things done even if it is like a sailing boat tacking wildly from side to side but making headway. One person moves it ahead and to the left, the next also ahead but to the right as well.

The one thing they do not want to see is some kind of hypocrisy. Claudia has witnessed first-hand those that encourage others to forfeit things and undergo pain but live an elevated life themselves. Claudia also has the benefit of a religious upbringing and therefore can bring a lot of its messages to the table. However, the rest feel that whilst these messages have resonance in any day and age, a state can be founded on equivalent high morals without reference to any superior being - being the one providing guidance. They all agree that if any kind of dictatorship emerges, then it will be time limited as this metaphorically speaking reduces the risk of tacking so far and for so long sideways that the boat hits the rocks.

A democracy is often considered to be the least worst option. A theocracy here is a potential but not enthusiastically endorsed by all, so they agree to appoint a chairperson to oversee a pragmatocracy. The chairman has a specific role in eliciting as much agreement as possible. It takes restraint and skill to get the group to come to decisions rather than be the one to decide everything. They ensure all get to speak, allow only one person at a time to make their case in a timely fashion. The chairman would ask a lot rather than say a lot.

When votes are needed, they take the form of black stones handed out equally. People can use them on an issue or hold back and use lots on something that they have bigger concerns about. So long as a majority is cast, in this case 3 or more stones, then the motion is approved.

The riff-raff can be excluded by presenting the issues in a convoluted complex way rather than in plain simple terms. All four will have to be on their toes looking out for some clever mind games that pushes one or two out and eliminates their share of involvement in the running of the island; People voting to avoid too much friction, rather than being fully conversant with the motions put forward.

The fly on the wall is keen to see if some form of community-ism manifests itself with everyone mucking in for the good, the

benefit of everyone or whether as time passes more effort is spent on individual advancement. The fly has seen it all and can't recollect witnessing a movement that has no downsides. The more intense the capital system, the more it brings about a dog-eat-dog mentality with ever increasing pressure to move ahead and no time or proper consideration for the weaker less able members. People there feel a failure if not doing super wonderful things. Then it saw the farcical pretence that people are really willing to work for the greater good and remain truly contented in their own lives. The fly lies dormant until a hopeful passes and maggots its way from inside to out, consuming the bulk of any that are buried. The fly's children, then seek new spots in hope of fulfilling the dream of their ancestors, which is to find a place with a balance so elegant that no more dirty work of meddling is needed, but expects it to be fragile, guaranteeing it won't last long.

All play a part

Ben is keen to divvy up the day-to-day tasks and split the chores equally. Whilst Rachael is willing to climb the trees to collect coconuts and has sea legs to do the fishing, Dave thinks it is fine to do the delegating and hone a long-standing talent playing the bongos. Claudia feels like the one most suited to collecting the firewood and Ben has no intention of letting the chef skills that have taken years to learn go to waste. The bone of contention is the principle of not playing your part in keeping the island running. In the world at large, you can indeed make a good living from entertaining others with music if you get enough willing to pay to hear your output. On an island with an audience of just three it is not going to work. Shirkers will need to be dealt with. None of the four propose to let anyone starve and signal clearly that if one were to hurt themselves then they would be supported through their recuperation. However, allowing one or more to sit about idly with the remaining picking up the slack is not going to be tolerated for long. Even if you can't walk you can peel the vegetables and help as much as you can in some other capacity.

Claudia knows that one day there will be that one individual that will not muck in. Once their tummy begins to really rumble and they begin to faint people will relent and offer lifesaving food. Claudia wants to ensure that it will be the bare minimum.

Chores

There is a spring in Claudia's step when going off to top up the water. For this chore is a pain, but also an opportunity to spend a brief time alone, revel in the change in the seasons and take in the beauty of the environment. Racheal has an ability to switch off when doing the dull tasks and focus the mind on other things. Ben sings and jives when at work and defers the burden of

cajoling to the others who have to prod Dave endlessly to get out of the hammock and into action. Dave read this book and took one thing from it. That was the wisdom of getting hold of another book, 1001 excuses for not doing things, and saw the usefulness of it when embarking on this new life on the island. Dave hasn't even got the imagination to think up new excuses on the spot but did get the overriding message though of trying to identify those that are even lazier than you. In addition, it was easy to grasp the power of the tactic where you push your argument to the max with as much emotive force as possible. However, Dave didn't bank upon the fact that it is much easier to hide in a large arena than a place where everyone is so much more accountable.

Tales of hardship, misfortune and unjust treatment by an uncaring system are abound. A policy is enacted, and it makes it far fairer for the majority. However, there will be a miniscule proportion of losers. Complaints will come in and only the plight of the few will be mentioned. People will make compelling arguments, but it doesn't wash with those that have to bear the weight of the funding and the work required to pay for those wanting more. The problems brought about by new policies on the tiny minority do matter but everything is exaggerated. It is futile to point out the benefits to the society as a whole. Anything promoting the wider view tends to fall on deaf ears. Dave can spend as much energy as he likes to try to convince the others that special treatment is deserved. Like a gambler who has already put so much in, and too entrenched to pull out. They will carry on in the same vein, believing that the next coin will get the desired result but ends up bust. They then leave thinking the whole world is against them. Never to their dying day are they ever prepared to even hint at the possibility that they are wrong. Claudia listens and grins, Rachael grimaces, Ben raises an eyebrow, and they all wander off to carry on with what they were doing.

When cars finally arrive on the island you can bet that nobody bar a few will ever think that they as drivers are ever in the wrong. It is best to shout out 'idiot' than consider why they are moving so slowly. Ignore the fact that they are looking for a place, checking the directions. Ben always drives perfectly, or so he thinks, it is always the other person at fault. Another area of autistic behaviour, only seeing things from our point of view.

Ben begins to argue compellingly that all the improvements they make bring about a reduction in the anxiety felt about having to do chores. Things become easier through the investment made in small time saving measures. We can spend an hour today and save three minutes a day, which gets recouped in a few short weeks and pays dividends in the months ahead. Ben is quick to

promote the fact that they also have more fall backs when things go awry. More planning saves a lot and potentially extends their very existence on the island. Building for greater convenience and more comforts is attractive. Nevertheless, it can be important knowing that you can soon find yourself working towards an early grave. Time whizzes by. You age and ache more. We can lose sight of possibilities, of real meaning, because of a fixation on making never ending alterations to our landscape.

Dave at least, albeit unconsciously, saw that it is sometimes worth being able to put up with a little imperfection in the manor. Good enough rather than everything just so. When you persist in worrying about every little detail of what could be done to make things better, you can find that addressing it consumes a lot of time. It reduces the time to appreciate time itself, time doing things you want to do. Dave will play a part for sure but won't become encumbered by guilt for not playing to the tune of the rest of the group all the time.

All four discover in short order that many of the dreams of what they hoped to achieve won't materialise. They had a detailed idea of how they thought things would go, but as time passes things begin to pan out differently from what was expected. Nevertheless, they have created a system that provides for themselves and gives them an opportunity to bring children up under their own steam. That alone is highly satisfying. It doesn't have to be the best island in the world right now and may never become so, but they can't be mocked for their self-sufficiency. It is quite an achievement to manage without reliance on others on the outside.

Who to allow in?

Rachael raises the question of whether they would allow any more people to join their little paradise. What do they do if someone floated in on some driftwood hoping for salvation? A profound level of sympathy would be shown towards those that have had to leave a place that was home for a long time but has become uninhabitable now.

The four see little controversy in pointing out that anyone who were to join would surely need to adopt their leadership and abide by all the rules in place. Claudia has been horrified when people joined their church expecting long standing members to change their ways to suit ideas these new characters have. These new people didn't just make suggestions and see how they went down, instead they infiltrated the organisation and bit by bit transformed it into something very different to how it was before. Ben was involved in a political movement and also recognised a similar pattern take shape, despairing at the way things crept up

and went against the grain of the foundational principles that attracted so many to it in the first place.

Infiltration

Dave asks the more profound question of who owns the earth. Are we right to claim this island for ourselves? Both Claudia and Rachael make the obvious remark that they were there first and most certainly don't feel inclined to have their spot ruined just because other people have messed up their own island. They don't want to make a great deal of sacrifice or go beyond the call of duty helping others to such an extent that they will miss out. They have plans to have children of their own and want to put them in the front of the queue ahead of outsiders. Dave can see that there is no shortage of space on this island to fit a good number of people in. There will be longer waits at the well, more noise and more disruption, but potentially more things getting done on the island as well. There is a trade-off between some attractive benefits against less serenity and loss of control. Worse still, new ideologies may not be particularly welcome now that so many principles have been established and enjoyed.

Claudia has another worry, that being what do they do should a group of people invade the island. They can't fend off a large attacking force. They can potentially talk with their neighbouring island communities and form a pact so that nobody is subjected to such perils. Nevertheless, they are vulnerable. An island community would be commended if it throws its arms open to visitors especially if there was something there of geographical significance.

Ben has spent the most time building a place called home and treasures it deeply. By sharing it with the others there is a connection and shared ownership that spreads out to the boundary of the whole island. It won't be just Ben that would feel somewhat cheated if it was taken away from them against their will. All of them understand that it is rough for people who live in a failed state and don't feel like they have the means necessary to put things right. It can be tough for people to break away from somewhere, especially the place of their birth due to the changes developing there. Some will stay put, maybe because they are too old or too weary to leave and whilst it is regarded as unfair, will look upon it as an evolution that they are stuck with. Sometimes it is a case of trying to make the best of a bad situation. Few relish relocating. Everything gets more awkward once all the places with the fine geography begin to fill up, so there is an incentive to remedy the problems at the source.

Some people keep themselves to themselves and concentrate on making their own area as good as it can be. It can become a beacon for others to consider emulating. However, Claudia saw

people not bothering to do that. They were instead more focused on spreading an ideology as far afield as possible. Hence, we are faced with invaders by force or by stealth. An individual will attain power, cement it through domination and will have a temptation to push it out like a fungus consuming all in the way. Some play the long game, waiting for sufficient traction to spring a new way of life on all of us.

Some places have reasonable philosophies laid out but are poorly interpreted. Countries may have a written constitution with an importance placed upon armies, aims regarding the development of agriculture and so forth. People in charge take it upon themselves to ensure that no stone is left unturned getting the defences in place and so much money is spent on that, that agriculture, business, and other commerce become neglected. The aims are useless if not adhered to in a measured way. Paranoia and propaganda take the place of prudence.

There is no money as such on this tiny island nor any need for it yet. Neither is there any thinking that things in the shared pool belong to a distant body. Likewise, a collective share and share alike ambition is fantastical. Ben has made the best hammock and loves it dearly. Make no mistake about it, it has been made clear that there is no wish to have Dave, or anyone else anywhere near it. Sharing has its limits. When Ben wants to lie down, Ben wants to lie down and gets aggravated by keep having to turf Dave out and then always be the one cleaning and de-crumpling it. People find that no amount of favours can really compensate for the option to have what is theirs when it suits them most. Ben is not mean nor selfish and like the rest will share many things, but a free for all is a naïve dream and will remain as that, just an idea that never sees the light of day. Whilst they all fall into a blissful level of cooperation, they respect each other's preferences where practical. Convenience comes before romantic thinking. Ben would rather spend a few days making an extra knife to keep sharp and keep in the draw so that it is always there when required. Dave would rather have just one communal knife that they all use, but then who is the one that leaves it at the other end of the island and forgets to return it to the kitchen. In situations like this Ben could have made something else in that time, something for all or something for just their sole use, making them richer in effect but at a cost of many a bugbear. Some well-meaning principles and one for all and all for one schemes can be great on paper but hopeless in reality. They only work if everyone is exactly the same in every single respect and all individuality is banished along with freedoms to choose for ourselves.

We will pay for convenience sometimes. It all depends on our mood and the situation. We like to be able to choose and bring our personality into play. We could all car share so long as we accept the lack of choice of model, ignore the mess some leave it in, are patient waiting for one to be available, never mind being the one to deal with the maintenance and have no desire to personalise it. All to benefit from a relatively tiny reduction in costs. The fuel costs, wear and tear on the brakes and tyres etc. and the depreciation in value are all dependant on the mileage so no savings there. Only a little of the capital costs is saved, not much for all the aggravation that it entails. Idealists may not always disregard the details but will ignore our unwillingness to do things that break away from the way we like them. We find methods that work for us and want to retain a way of life. It is not a reluctance to change the amount we consume but being pushed to change the way we do things that matters the most. If you have concerns about your personal consumption and the impact it has on the environment, you can choose to earn less thereby use less.

We may tinker more, adjust more, and attenuate our activities reducing the harm, but it will not halt the inevitable. Humankind has always been inclined to travel a course towards a calamity of its own making. Vested interests conquer. We need constant reward, rewards today at the detriment of the future. I mentioned before, the rat wired to an electric circuit and its craving for more and more until it dies. We too can't muster the will to disconnect the cord. What will be will be.

In an economy with market forces prevailing there is a potential to pay more in compensation for jobs that are least enjoyed. We can pay to have others do things we don't want to get involved in. In a controlled sharing economy, it would be nice to see all the plum favoured jobs handed out fairly and an abundance of volunteers to deal with the grim ones. However, it will just be the most adept at proving themselves to be the most worthy of better treatment that get the desired result instead of justifying it through working harder. The people that support the party in power get the beachside houses, the rest get allocated a tiny grim plot on a flood plain.

Ben of course would pay a premium in life prior for first class tickets but go without many other things to pay for them. Sacrificing one pleasure for another is par for the course and a nature of freedom rather than envy. My business, not your business to interfere with. It is hard to adjust the system to make it more equitable and remove the wealth imbalance without capsizing the whole ship. People have tried setting punitive taxes and are keen to have redistribution measures in place. The more they try to make it fair the more iniquities and grief they cause.

People get fed up with the system and make plans to escape. Then the borders are locked down to keep people from leaving. As that fails, those in command are constantly suppressing uprisings. Once it becomes so out of balance, Claudia's nightmare becomes evident where only those in charge are in the lap of luxury and the rest scrape about in the wasteland. The social principle is respected but feared in equal measure. Those that espouse it are habitually in a comfortable position already. They want to drag down those that want to work and be rewarded for their pluck. The wealthy have the means to move before it gets out of hand whereas the less well-off are never so fortunate. Those with the right tenacity at the right time will always prosper and you can't make money selling expensive goods and services if everyone is too poor to buy them. There is a certain degree of natural regulation, but there will be periods where some appear to have too much but measures to deal with it can create bigger headaches.

Your island may be blessed with some coconut trees. You can harvest them, eat and drink from them, and then make some maracas out of what remains. What you can't do is borrow them. You can only consume what you have. Big states generate 'I owe you' with a promise to pay back what is borrowed at a later date. Eating the fruits that you expect to have tomorrow makes the policy maker appear decent. However, it hides a nasty evil practice that is paid for by the next generation. The citizens get the impression that money grows on trees and that they can spend ad infinitum. One of the four had a sibling who took from their jar and kindly bought them a few things with some of it. It felt nice to be given gifts until they realized later how generous they were. How much fun it must be to spend other people's hard-earned money. Maybe it is acceptable so long as you spend some of it for the benefit of the loser/victim.

Counting a few coconuts is just about within the capability limits of the general populace. Understanding big numbers is much harder as most economic facts just wash over the top of people at large. The same data can be interpreted in all manner of different ways leading to no end of strife. The great thing about being a politician is that no matter how badly they mess up, they are rarely held to account. They just walk away and leave it to others to sort out. On this island they will attempt to address this by regular evaluations of what is going on. There will be proper punishment for serious negligence, so that at the very least it serves as a warning to future governors.

With help or on your own

Ben can manage a lot by himself and there are times where it is nice to go off diving alone without needing to get some of the

others involved. At other times it can be rather rewarding to do something with the whole camp on board helping. You can operate as a one-man band, but there is a lot to be had from being a small cog in a large machine. Constructing large buildings and making machines that fly are only possible with a fair degree of co-operation. Therefore, community-ism has remarkable upsides. Sporting events, rallies and large gatherings provide us with an atmosphere with no parallel in individual pursuits. Look at what we can do when we work together. Each contributor gets a sense of satisfaction that is not found when doing something solitary. You can split your time between doing things by yourself and things with others and find the fit that works to your mind-set. Both tacks can be sparkling. The only cause for concern arrives if the level of opportunity available is minimal and if coercion is in abundance to take part. There can be pressure to make people feel as though they must repay a debt to society. When people work mainly for themselves, they can see the benefits and decide upon how profits are spent, whereas the gains we see for the good of the whole are cloudy. Would you work a lot extra to pay for something that enhances your child's life, better education, better equipment, better whatever? Now think if you would honestly work a lot extra to help other people's children. Maybe, but only a small number seem to put their heart and soul into it. It seems as if people are willing to split the proceeds to some extent between what they keep and what they are prepared to give to the community. Finding the sweet spot is a task for the thick skinned, people that can brush off the flak.

Free to leave

After all the debate about allowing people in, there comes the moment of focussing on liberty to leave. When a child reaches a point when they are capable of looking after themselves, it would be unreasonable to make it awkward for them to go if they wanted to. Ben's aim is to settle on some very basic principles which will be kept to at all costs. Ben wants to avoid expanding on them, for it can lead to a super complex set of laws that get ever harder to understand and enforce. Ben declares that the first and foremost respect given to people of this island will be a freedom to leave unhindered. Any further fundamental aims will not number more than five or six, so that they are simple as possible and easily kept at the forefront of everyone's mind.

Claudia likes the idea of elementary laws and needs some convincing that Ben's declaration of the respect of peoples' desires is adequate, rather than people having rights as such. People wish to leave, and you do your utmost to allow them. More importantly you appreciate their desire to live. Most people on the island can see this and can make sure nobody does

anything to infringe upon that. Rachael also thinks it all sounds a little whimsical and not as definitive as strict cast iron protective laws. Yet no law stops the worst actions of all. We understand someone's wish to be unharmed. We may worry about a reprisal. We may fear getting caught and prosecuted. These things take a while to assess. The hurt we are about to inflict is understood immediately. The biggest thing that stops us from harming others is the empathy we have for one another rather than the legal consequences.

Having aims set out which are well promoted and encouraged is novel but effective. They will ensure that any transgressions that get reported will be dealt with in a timely fashion. Those in charge must adhere to them as fully as everyone else, else be removed from office by a simple process.

Another aim, suggested by Dave, relates to the conditions of entry. This is where the homeowner has the privilege of deciding who can enter and under what terms. Dave likes people to take their shoes off before coming in and other people may insist that nobody smokes, or lights incense inside. These and other guidelines are fine, yet they require clauses for when someone needs to be captured for severe misconduct. Can someone enter to get them out and on to the podium of justice if deemed rightful? It can all get complicated rather quickly. You build a school, insist upon people attending it and insist they remove their shoes when entering the building. You are caught between a rock and a hard place if you refuse to remove your shoes anywhere but are compelled to attend school. You can decline any offer of a dinner at Dave's place as you will be made to remove your shoes, but this isn't the case at the school. You either have a guide that lays out the precedence, which rule goes above the others or have an obligation to create a school that isn't so demanding about how you dress.

Expulsion

Ben is keen to settle the real problem that may arise when faced with dealing with someone who is guilty of a serious misdemeanour. Rachael jokes that if a certain person, Dave, doesn't get a move on with the jobs they have been assigned they will be expelled. In all seriousness, the principle is to prevent a reoccurrence of the same crime. Punishment is secondary for the clock cannot be turned back and many crimes cannot be undone. All you care about is making sure it doesn't happen again. Getting them to say sorry and incarcerating them for a period does not guarantee that they will not reoffend. Rachael is keen to recommend that any person who defies the aims and does something terrible would be ejected. However, the others point out they would not want to have a reject from another island

landing here, so neither would other people want to deal with their problematical characters. If someone is to be locked up, then there will not only be a timed based system for working out the point of release but also an assessment of the risk of them repeating previous wrong doings. If the probability seems very high, then the release would be postponed. A probation period checking for potential problems is common, but some people are synonymous with the proverbial scorpion and the frog with a sting that is always going to harm others despite any repercussions for themselves. They can't be helped; the innocent need not pay the price for allowing someone another chance. The priority of potential victims is diminished when we attempt to forgive and forget about nasty events in the hope that the unchangeable will moderate their behaviour. They will work while detained to earn an early release. Refusal to work will mean no time reduction of the sentence. Misbehaviour will increase it.



There is a flood, a major flood and the deluge will soon put the prison completely underwater. Do we release the inmates to avoid them drowning? Many will suggest they do, despite the warning that innocents are liable to be exposed to danger or even death by highly volatile convicts. We have our own morals, and they are a personal invention with most of it handed down from the elders. Many see it as morally dubious to allow someone out, knowing that the chance of a major offence on law abiding citizens will be close to certain. Harsh for the prisoners as they will perish, but people can find justification in their thinking of who they have the greatest concern for. You can put your head in the sand and avoid dwelling upon the plight of all the wrongdoers.

In a similar vein to ejecting those causing trouble, it is not unheard of for people in a nation to get so wrapped up in the utility argument that anyone too old, or too feeble, gets discarded. Once your usefulness comes to an end you are left on the scrap heap, for nothing eclipses the importance of the supposed prosperity of the zone. There is no room for frivolity, everything is set to expand the grandeur of the bigger cause. Heaven forbid, your form of entertainment, that you foot the bill for, doesn't meet the latest guidance announced. For their entertainment, their pleasure is truly gleaned from controlling your every move. They love it and get great satisfaction from devising and tinkering with more and more things that you can and can't do in your private life.

Some will say that you can pass any laws you like, just do not enforce them. When it comes to taking action, when you see somebody doing something wrong, you have a choice between

intervening or walking on by. If everyone turns a blind eye when they see a mugger or thief in action the system breaks down. A small but significant percentage of the population who are prepared to get involved is usually positive. If you are not willing to step in from time to time, your community becomes less favourable for you, your friends and family plus your postman, your doctor, your repairman and everyone else that contributes to your way of life. Once in a while, when you feel it is right to play your part. You act to keep your island, your corner, a nice place to live.

Do you avoid interfering with what is going on in other islands? Do you let them get on with it, or do you try to bring order to what you see as a chaotic situation? You would certainly want a chat with them if they were storing flammable material close by or polluting the water upstream. If you become aware that they are beating each other up or witness killing aplenty, it is quite a dilemma with no definitive answer. Do you have the means to break up the fighting, will it make it worse, and do you understand what the fighting is really over? There is something to be said for steering well clear until you are absolutely sure on all three counts. If there are ten people fighting and you send in fifty to break it up, chances are they will quickly capitulate, and no harm is done to your peacekeepers.

It can seem silly to think of things on the scale of a small island as there will be no hospitals, no government to check the standards and quality of produce on offer. There will be far less opportunity to retire and relax in the twilight years and the power of diversification, people specialising in complex fields is all but forgotten. A decent government can mediate and ensure a reasonable level playing field is kept and provide more real freedoms than a place where things are a mess. It becomes harsh if your personal safety is forever in jeopardy and only the fittest toughest make it through each day.

The one thing you can be sure about is how lines can get blurred. There is never any finality in an argument. Ideas flex and new problems emerge that couldn't be envisaged at an earlier time. The thought processes these people had on setting up this island may be agreeable or repulsive but give a hint of the quandaries we face. Either way there is one heck of a muddle and confusion with one doctrine overriding another. We will always be stuck with some difficult compromises. There will be times where better weather outshines frustration with the political framework in deciding what island to remain on. The debates rage on with different intensities bringing up new and old problems into the mix and so be it. The mistake is to think that we are more than just insects building a nest and adjusting to the ecosystem.

Many teenagers pipe up and ask why we need rules at all. A free for all is not outside the bounds of possibility and springs up in places from time to time. A motion for completely private enterprise in all areas has been mooted as well. All work for the disabled and infirm is carried out competently by the charities, businesses self-regulate, and people provide all their needs for themselves. Like all ideas of this nature there are pros and cons, with the cons being troublesome, people free to rip one another off. There will be a vast number of things to sort out, no police but a subscription to a private security force instead to name but one of them.

Claudia has indeed been surprised that we don't have more lands with a free for all. Rachael is more surprised that there are so many lands with the bulk of the population accepting the current status quo and tolerant of things the way they are. Ben asks how many people have grown up in their community and assumed that everything is normal and just the way it is. We say "they", they are inventing, they are coming out with, they are proposing and they, this hard-to-put-your-finger-on body, knows what is best for its citizens. You may know no different and haven't had exposure to other ways, nor have even considered other possibilities. A presumption pervades that this is the how it is and always has been, only 'they' have the power to change things. Constitutions have been written, legal frameworks put in place and only a mythical figure could ever realign them to a new age. Who are these great historical characters that set things in place? Many were spun out from humble ordinary beginnings with chance and circumstance that put them up on a parapet. There comes a point where amendments or complete rewrites are needed to our statutes, the control structure, that are more befitting of the way things have moved on. The underlying laws of the land can be changed if enough of the right people want it. However, in the same way as only a few people change the name given to them at birth not many want the inconvenience of going against the grain.

No state that we build will be problem free nor perfect in all respects but if you were to start over or repair a system you might consider one cornerstone to be a device that keeps out and dispels any artificial rankings. It is evident that some show great delight in giving some people a 'type' and thus having a higher or lower status than the rest. People preserve their caste, class, and social orders to maintain the differential for the ruling elite. We like the idea of progression through education and training. We like the idea of being above others based on heredity reasons more so, as no effort is required. Nothing beats a demonstration that we have equal validity, neither looking up nor down at one another. It is well known that the more we mingle the more we

realise that each of us are fundamentally the same. We all eat, sleep and defecate as animals of the same species.

Dave came up with a couple of ideas, one has merit, the other highly misguided. As their children turn into adults, they will be given a plot of land on the island for which to build their shack. Just a small square piece with no assistance in the construction but an approval to build something of a reasonable size. The cost to the community is small, but the benefit of having a stake in the island is huge. The repellent idea that Dave proposed is that each person would be given a daily allowance of one coconut, one fish and some bread. This would be applicable to everyone including those with a stack of coconuts piled up high by their front door and fifty fish dried out in their back room. It neglects to take into account that someone has to get the coconuts down, someone has to fish, and someone has to labour kneading and baking the dough. Worse still the reward system only works when you go and do something to get it. People become lazy, dissatisfied with life. They get greedy and want ever more things for free. Having something to do, compulsion just to survive, is not just about making the time pass quicker it pleases the soul.

The simplistic tale of setting up and running a small island could run to thousands of pages and still not cover even a good percentage of all the basic things to consider let alone the finer details. Yet whilst this writing itself is very simplistic, it provides a means to think about what we would do in that kind of situation and then apply it to the problems in bigger societies. When you consider how a policy would be constructed with a tiny number of people, it can be transposed in its entirety to a huge country with a new form of unsophistication.

The group kept a list of motions that were agreed on by all. Whilst vague were held as being the spirit of the law. Freedom to leave, unencumbered. Respect other people's desire to live. 'What is the harm to others?' standpoint on doing what you like. Freedom to express our opinions but avoiding slander. We might have free speech, but is it safe to express what we like? Ensure the probability of any reoffence of a crime is negligible. All people are equally valid in all things.

Contribute a sensible proportion of time, effort, or resources for the benefit of all. Many hands make light work principle – enlist every hand/mind possible. Fixed term chairmanship. No person can linger in the role. Welcome visitors to view the geography.

Hocus Pocus

Do you want to be admired, revered, respected and most of all have lots of people hanging on to your every word? Do you want followers and be a renowned central member of the community? If so then throw away any scepticism and start making claims, exaggerated claims. The crazier they are the more likely they are to be believed. Don't whatever you do make the mistake of many a magician, never let people know the secret of your magic. Once they know how it is done, they lose interest. I told you about curiosity, it is an essential ingredient in keeping people keen to find out more.

Your principal aim is to be the one providing hope. Hope that they might live forever or return to a faultless better world. You have to convince them to believe. Point out there is always hope even in the word hopeless. Show that if they have faith, real undeniable faith they will be rewarded. The rewards will go far beyond anything that a human could usually attain. Don't be fooled, you will give people great comfort and relieve them of a mountain of anxiety. They will have purpose and reason. They will get a wave of relief wash over them. They will be instilled with the notion that they are doing the right thing. Those that became disillusioned with life will be glad you saved them.

You are likely to need a lot of money to build places of worship and pretend to give to charity. Once again, I told you about our co-considerational selfishness. People will feel much better when they are giving, especially as it will be going to such an admirable cause. Ask them for regular payments, don't be shy about it. As leader you won't have time to work thus you will have honourable justification to hive off some modest living excesses.

Now you face a choice. How bold are you going to be? You could aim low and be a local preacher, that will be pretty good and offers a modicum of power. If you are prepared to move up the ranks and have the tenacity to jive through the internal politics, you could climb to regional minister. The really daring will strike out - making it known that they are a direct descendant of god. This is risky though. You will have to counter many claims of being an imposter. It is much harder now than it was a thousand, two thousand years ago. Backstories are harder to forge now. It will be well worthwhile if you manage to pull it off though. People will adore you and write many stories about your life. You can put out edicts every day that encourage people to behave in ways that you approve of. You will be the ultimate law maker that crosses all boundaries. People will come to visit you from far afield, maybe for just a hug or handshake.

If religion is not concordant with your nerve or personality you have a cornucopia of alternate directions to take. Conspiracies, ghosts and the paranormal. Or maybe investigate becoming a clairvoyant, tea leaf reader or astrologist. I took up palmistry realising that dismissing other people's hocus pocus flattened the mood at any gathering. People are enthralled by the mystical and gyrate away from those calling it a load of rubbish. It is much better to join in. You can be up and running in a few minutes. Take their hand and turn it over. Peer at the lines making a note of the intensity. Gauge where the branches and breaks are. Now you need to invent a fortune telling yarn. Going by their age you can ascertain a compelling point in the person's life where something momentous will occur. You can say that in five to six years' time they will encounter a fork in the road. Things will be good if they choose wisely. You can also calculate a point in their life prior when something significant happened from the proportion of the line length to where the break is. Like all good liars, you need a good memory. They may challenge you a few weeks later and they are more likely to remember what you said about them than you will.

Some of the most ardent doubters have found themselves getting rather good at such wizardry. They then begin to reconsider their cynicism. It is like trying to explain hunches you get that turn out to be true. Those that get carried away with it, feel more relevant as they are doing something wonderful for others. Being larger than life provides an excellent excuse for questionable behaviour in other areas.

I tell people about the time when I settled into bed and could see a light. It was small bright and piercing. It was visible whether my eyes were open or shut. Make no mistake about it, it was a light as real as can be and not imagined. In the morning I thought about this, then recalled how I was in the bar and was looking at a small bulb where the plastic cover over it was missing. Hence the light I saw. It was odd that it came 'on' some hours after I had left the place. I don't explain that part of the story as that is all science, persistence of vision and an aberration. It tends to go in one ear and out the other of those that are still listening. Others will see a brighter more impressive light and are better than me at convincing people that they were individually picked out to spread a message from yonder.

The truth is all one big disappointment. Father Christmas and the tooth fairy pan out to be just your dull old dad telling lies. It is horrible to discover that a fortune teller is adept at using language trickery rather than being capable of making spiritual contact. We don't want to know that we received clever generalisations that apply to big chunks of the population rather than bespoke custom

information delivered for us alone. We were happy so long as *some* of what is foretold is correct. We can be satisfied even if the proportion of what is fairly accurate to what is blatantly wrong is worse than something knowingly given at random. It is akin to the real placebo effect of being told you are going to be alright by a doctor in a white coat. We believe in the person as much as what information they impart.

Rational thinking is unhelpful when we search for a sign that loved ones, recently departed, are watching over us. We seek positivity rather than potential downsides. If something in my house moves it could be a sign from my late partner. If my partner wants me to join them, they need do nothing but dislodge a tile from the roof at the right time. Were that to happen though, I could blame the wind. Maybe ghostly terrorists are missing a trick?

Please join the ranks of those that rave about strange events as there is an oversupply of those waiting to soak it all up. If you are 40 years old you have lived for about 14600 days, taking this large numbers of days into account it is quite unlikely that something strange, weird, or coincidental won't occur. Some people will have read articles explaining how our minds often jitter just before we go to sleep or upon waking up. Therefore, it is best to recant our tales of ghostly tales or visits from angels with specific clarifications. It was mid-afternoon, you were sober as a judge and the cat witnessed it.

What if you are an original type? You feel that your life must have a greater purpose. You have taken a good look at the commercial hocus pocus such as tarot cards, crystal balls et al, and feel they are not helping people as much as they could. Why not announce yourself as a spiritual saint with a paragon of virtue. You could secretly wander into people's lives and put things on a better course. Save the lost and savour the taste of doing invisible deeds that is lessening the pain of individuals in need. It is hard to refrain from proclaiming to the masses about your efforts, but essential to keep quiet about it as that could dampen your power. It is an unwelcome trade off. Those close to you will be in the know and that will be enough, they will support you in your earthly needs.

Faith

One way to show that you have doubts about your faith is to get very upset when your children explore other faiths. Not only ought they follow the exact same branch of your faith but demonstrate a commitment to it. They must be made to feel very guilty for not attending church every week. Disown them, or at least threaten to if they mention absconding from the religion passed down to them at birth.

A messenger from god would never be a fraud and most certainly not have delusions of grandeur. They even con themselves into believing their role. Some have demonstrated their position by sacrificing the remainder of their life. Their legacy weighs heavier than a few more years of bounty. Sacrificing oneself is not that great a rarity. Protesters have doused themselves with petrol and set themselves alight. Others have signed their death warrant when making a stand against the government or the enemy. Therefore, you will need a bit of mystery and intrigue to make your early death really add to god's mission.

Your religion may be popular now, but all religions started off as tiny groups and like random pop artists started to get more prominent. Most faded away but a few managed to stick it out and beguile large numbers.

What about those with no faith? Some attend church to see a good friend get married. Some to say a farewell and thereby don't feel so bad eating from the after-funeral buffet if they have endured a bit of reflection at the service prior. Aside from these events, a church is not much more than a well-positioned feature of the town. I have asked people if they are worried by the possibility of being sent to a hell because they have failed to follow various teachings. Many simply shrugged their shoulders and indicated that it is of no great concern. A few suggested that the world is hell anyway. I got a sense that for these people it was not something that worried them much, they have no fear of eternal damnation. It does seem somewhat unfair to be sent to a hell if you live a virtuous admirable life in a country which is out of reach of such religious knowledge. Or born without the capability to understand and end up tortured.

Believe anyway

What about hedging your bets? Believe, and if you are wrong so be it. If you are right, then heaven it is. Do we need something grander and outside of ourselves? Something that is magical and gravity defying that gives us optimism. Perhaps, and I am envious of those that hold out for their spiritual entity to come up trumps. All I can offer is cold and brutal - or appears so at first glance.

The spectacle, the grandeur of a many a place of worship is something to behold. They have an ability to move us emotionally when we enter. So much effort by so many talented committed people to build. Surely those commissioning them did so with an unswerving belief that it was based on a foundation of something credible. How different to the palaces of consumerism.

Any get together has the potential to make a mark on our lives. Join an art group or spend a week at a festival and draw on your spiritual side. It is not just churches that can make us mellow. The

greatest healing aid comes from nothing more than the virtue of having people listen to our problems. Some churches will have a sing along with no music and the heart of the human voice is appreciated. In others there is some rousing music with a beat and melody that really raises the spirits of the congregation. There are though, many places where you can experience this kind of uplifting camaraderie and clap along, vocalising and getting carried away from the soullessness of other areas of life. You can learn a great deal from the texts of the religions big and small without having the perquisite of faith. The message can be powerful. A greater one need not have given it to us. Man writes and decides who to attribute the writings to.

Once you see the light you encounter the dark realm of evangelism. One man or one woman alone doesn't make a religion. You need to build that pyramid. You can do it in so many ways. Quietly, subtly, leaving pamphlets about with a heartfelt mini autobiography. A concise story of your former life of greed and going nowhere to this new revelatory illustriousness. Please include an experience that you had, one that imbued you with the holy nectar, in a place of reverence. Try to avoid making yourself seem superior, you want people to feel included rather than shallow. Be the inspiration, a guiding force that has walked the rocky path and is there to show others the way too.

The joy of evangelism comes from the fact that everyone can take part and feel involved. You don't have to be the biggest chief in the area by any means. Try name calling, declaring out loud that someone is a heretic, unworthy, disgusting, and cheap. It makes you feel great, better. Get the jargon right. Don't use the term book or text, use scripture for that has much more resonance. Castigate and enjoy. Nothing and I mean no amount of successes in life or levels of narcissism reached can compare to being a spiritual proponent. It is the pinnacle of greatness and is the exact opposite of a worthless mediocre life.

Despite all your enthusiasm and aura of confidence about your faith and your religion, you will meet a lot of pesky awkward types that ask difficult questions. You might not have the answers so like any good salesman you can go and find out from a more scholarly accomplice. When asked why each cult or religion has different practices, different policies and are contrary to one another tell them that they can be thought of as all aiming for the centre of a dartboard.

Logic and religion. Antonym? Relevant? Pertinent? Important? When something is prefixed by god you can always find a good way to present the reasoning. For a start no human will even hope to get close to comprehending what god can do. It is akin to us

having one dimensional sight in a three-dimensional universe. We can never see beyond a single plane. Only god can.

Humanity evolves, technology improves and changes in attitude bring issues to the fore that were not envisaged at the time of writing all those years ago. However, we can reinterpret what is laid out in print. We can make it fit any situation we want. You would assume that messages from god sent through messengers would be clear and precise. Ambiguity, vagueness, and the ability to work things to suit those in power was deliberate. It is a testing test to see if we guess right or not.

Religion is not a joke, but jokes made by some of the religious are rather good. The best joke they reel off is the one where they say that god was diverted from the problems we have with malaria, violence, earthquakes, forest fires and so forth and decided to create a person who will jump a few inches further than all other men in the past. God disliked the current record holders. God also likes us to pray that our team will win. Both teams are praying so the lord measures the depth of the fawning and sees which is showing the most sincerity and then facilitates their triumph.

Does god intervene? We see the signs. We see the results. We see what we want to see. As a child I did indeed pray the once, asking for help as to where my bible was. A fraction of a second after, I could see clearly where it lay. I would not have even found it were it not for this divine hand. There is however no greater insult than to express fake false belief in something. The act of prayer is to calm yourself down. If you calm yourself down by other means is that not an equally reliable way to put your thoughts, memories, and hope in order. Do we see clearer when less agitated, less frenetic?

The real question is whether the ideas are so profound that no human could have come up with them without outside influence. Anyone that locked themselves in a room or went up a mountain for a few days and thought about various edicts would come up with roughly the same basic agreeable laws. No killing one another, no forcing yourself on someone, no taking without prior permission and other principles that are quite obvious. All the discussions you have had in your lifetime can culminate in a vision that shows collective wisdom.

God and the universe maybe viewed as the same interchangeable thing. There again, a god may have considered running an experiment. Could I the lord almighty create a system that enables things to form. Things that get more complex and through a process of natural elimination become ever more intelligent. Right through self-awareness to a point where they are able to comprehend who I am. I would do such an experiment

with no interference once set in motion. It would be interesting to see the outcome. We are in god's fish tank.

When we are young, we look up to our parents to gauge whether our actions are right or not. Many will later transfer this reassurance that we are following the correct course to a new figure, another authoritative figure. We as parents can't avoid some level of bias in our guidance. Those in our care will be subjected to our political, moral, and spiritual ideologies. If their mind is cluttered with all your thoughts, they are prone to become blighted by it and tend to see it from that perspective only. People do not need to be coerced into a solid faith; they will come to it on their own accord because they see its greatness by themselves. People will adopt it because of its potency rather than to keep the peace in a family unit.

There is an analogy between a child and an insect that is drawn towards the light of a fire and would get burned to death if not stopped. If a child is not led on the correct path they will end up in disarray. A better use of this analogy would be to suggest that if a child puts their fingers in the electric socket they will suffer, and it is a parent's job to prevent them from doing so. A parent's task is to keep them from danger, minimise the risks to the best of their ability, then allow the resulting adult the opportunity to find a route for themselves.

Why waste time debating potentially valid points when it is easier to get rid of detractors. Burn the witches. Cults banish those that have doubts. Make them nervous of missing out, stop them seeing their families. If you have a solid belief, then you ignore the few doubters rather than raise their profile by highlighting their cynicism.

The mommy monkey beats the child. The child squirms and returns. The mommy monkey beats the child. The child squirms and returns. The mommy monkey beats the child. The child squirms and returns. Experiments have shown this. Disturbing to watch but insightful. Preacher gives hope. The flock gathers. Preacher shown to be an outright fraud. The flock is unsettled briefly but returns. The church can beat, rape and torture members of the congregation and some will re-examine their faith. But return they do. Hope and reason pull us in with a magical power that no money, love, or common sense can intercept. Hope and reason encompasses the entire span of your life. The deeds of the devil are beatable.

What is the alternative? Once you are dead you are dead. When the oil in the lamp runs out, we are no more. Say it how you say it in your culture. It is vacuous, empty and an unenticing way to see things. Even a legacy will not make up for the loss of eternal life here after. However, we have a few advantages. We are less

restricted. We have the confidence to really live the life we have. We refrain from sticking our savings into a scheme offering high unsustainable rates of return. We know that if it is too good to be true then it invariably is. We aren't fooled by seemingly obvious cons, despite the high number of adherents and endorsers. We know that people highlight positives and play down negatives.

False correlations

Food, food, glorious food stacked high in supermarkets in every town. Not so everywhere. In bygone eras food supply varied throughout the year with a bounty at harvest time and eked out over winter. Thus, the time of year that you showed your face for the very first time could have an impact on how you develop. We can run with this idea, the level of nutrients you got whilst in the womb allows us to make some future prediction about your prosperity. We can give you a personal star sign as the planets would be in a certain position when your parents copulated. Everyone born in the same month can be shown to have remarkably similar personalities. They are not vague and nor are they generalisations that apply in equal measure to everyone else. They follow a one-in-five rule. You scan the predictions given to you and spot one out of the five portents that seems appropriate and cling to that. The rest is background noise – to be ignored.

We washed, clothed, and fed our children. We took them to the park three times a week. We bought them presents at Christmas and on their birthdays. We read to them night after night and comforted them when they were troubled. We acted as a taxi driver and lent them cash and never got repaid. What do they remember about all this? They only recall the 'bad' things, the things we forgot to do or failed to get right. If we did well on a hundred things and fell short on one, you can be sure the one thing wrong will stick out like a missing brick in a wall. Now turn that inside out and think how that relates to hocus pocus. We see that oddity and make a big deal out of it. People do, however, get things right sometimes but for the wrong reasons.

What else can we use to add weight to our belief in the supernatural? The tides? Animals behaving oddly during the full moon. Hormones, temperature fluctuations, anything to shine light on random correlations. Besides, you can't beat blue skies and warmer weather to give a mood lift for the bulk of the population, much more so than day after day of grey skies and rain. If it makes you feel good, you might be more positive and perhaps more open to luck and good fortune.

In times of desperation, it is hardly surprising that people will think it better to spend the last few pieces of silver on a last chance to win big than stop and think about rebuilding in a way

that is more certain. Laziness and the fast fix are so much more attractive. Myths and falsehoods seep into the conscious of the many and in most parts little damage is done. However, there are times when farcical claims create uncertainty and put people off making sensible choices.

The essence of science is to set out an experiment and repeat it over and over to see if it is consistent. Then publish the results so that other people can repeat it as well. You need to be careful on so many counts. Let's say you test a headache pill. You can't be sure that the water that you use to swallow the pill might be as helpful in alleviating the pain as the pill itself. Was it the pill or was the water countering dehydration? You must be absolutely sure the item you are testing is the active component and that you keep every variable the same each time you run any experiment. Science can be misinterpreted. Science can be wrongly applied. Statistical proofs lend weight to an argument rather than give us scientific proof. If what you are doing is based on science but is outside of precise laboratory conditions, it can no longer be legitimately called science. It is a gamble, punt, postulation, or an educated guess. Things that we take for fact can often turn out to be somewhat dubious when properly examined. Facts can be checked, tested, and scrutinised then modified once more information comes to light.

Physics and philosophy

It is beyond count the number of times I have sat with people who have recounted a long-winded story about a strange encounter. Then there were those that felt the presence of the ethereal wind. I don't object to them telling the tale and getting it off their chest, conversations about the price of cat food are even more dispiriting. What got my notice was how all the other people were interested and quizzed them about all the finer details to such great lengths. It was a revelation about how people even if not entirely convinced or sucked in paid them so much attention.

A torch that emits a beam of darkness instead of a beam of light is a conjecture that stems from not having a basic grounding in physics. It is one of many great philosophical thought experiments that can be explored. Light can be cancelled out, so it is not beyond reason. However, in the same way that conspiracy theories fall flat on their face during closer inspection you need to appreciate all the factors involved in physics. To get this darkness through cancellation, it works best when the light is of the same frequency, polarised and in line. Light in your room is of many frequencies spread in all directions - not polarised and you can't line it up with the countless scatterings abound. The message is simple; you need some understanding of science to aid many philosophical propositions. It is all too easy to get taken

in by wild ideas. A proper wag would say that maybe we are looking at the problem all wrong. Instead of using light to counter and cancel, maybe the torch could emit a beam of light soaking particles. The bounds of people's enthusiasm to go counter to anything rational have no limits.

We sure like to speculate on things that have not been proven yet. If there is a field that permeates right across the universe, a field that cannot be detected directly, it could be the key to the explaining strange things that we experience. The electricity in your head connects with smaller sub-atomic particles which in turn uses the field to transfer energy. Given that there are so many electrons moving about all over the place inside your head and everywhere in your surroundings, there would undeniably be lots of interference. Thus, explaining why spiritualists get so much wrong.

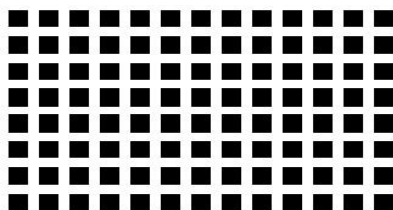
Any mystic worth their salt would have a good grounding in body language. They become adept at jumping on any reaction to what their punters say in the affirmative and gloss over everything that show signs of being at odds with their expectations. Psychology is a different ball game. A good psychologist makes a case based on multiple observations. They see someone do something a few times before they make a judgement. A mystic doesn't get to see a punter repeat a trait. Those that don't make enough effort to practice and practice will be deemed a fraud. When someone smirks, tell them that you know when they are going to die. It usually jolts enough to temper their efforts to lambaste you.

If you are ever to take one thing from any form of hocus pocus, human contact, human connections and especially time directed at you personally has therapeutic value. It doesn't matter how others perceive it if it is helpful to you in some way.

A diver was trapped underneath an extremely heavy metal door whilst exploring a shipwreck. Thankfully, a dive buddy was on hand to lift it up, enough to free this good mate. It was either god being kind or an angel that was watching over them for they were given the strength to overcome the incredible weight of this large object. The door was later brought up on to the dive boat deck. One by one the sailors each tried to lift it, but not one of them could. Hence being in the situation of having to save someone's life gives us power that without such pressure we cannot summon. Or that we overlook that metal has some buoyancy and weighs its volume, 1kg per cubic decimetre, less when submerged in water.

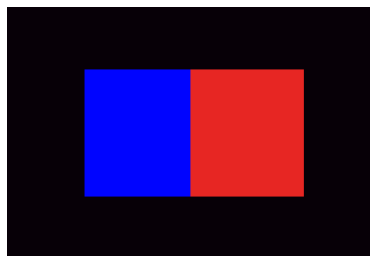
Our Reality

There is a big difference between what is really in front of us and what we perceive there to be. We live in our own personal reality. What you see is different to what others see. Everyone's set of colour receptors are different. Your idea of what red is, is quite likely to be a different shade to other people. We can assume that what we see is the correct version of our surroundings.



People born with no vision have had operations in later life to give them the gift of sight. Now with the apparatus to see you might expect them to suddenly obtain vision straightaway like turning on the television.

However, this doesn't turn out to be the case, they need to learn to make sense of the world first. The same thing applies to those that were deaf at an early age and then had an implant to provide hearing. Only after a very long taxing period of time can they understand the complexities of music and speech. Here are some visual illusions that a camera would not be fooled by; Non-existent dots and the red appearing to be closer than the blue.



Fog can create a speed illusion making people drive faster than they realise. We think the moon gets bigger when it is lower on the horizon. We make lots of judgement errors, that we learn to live with and accept. However, we take offence when our rational thinking is called into question. We

have an emotive attachment to the world rather than a more factual one. Our imagination allows us to fill in what we want to see and filter out what goes against our beliefs.

I have often looked at a picture, particularly a small thumbnail sized one and could not make sense of it initially. After a little while you work out what the picture is and then re-see it and in a new light altogether. It takes a while at times to make sense of our surroundings as the mind has not got the capacity to take in every pixel of what is available. Life is not as it seems.

Some people are loath to admit they are wrong. We are somewhat more willing to fess up to certain judgement mistakes than admitting our mind made other kinds of errors. It is strange that we can have little problem with acknowledging our spelling mistakes, and if we drop something, we just put it down to our fallibility, an accident. Yet to spell something wrong or break something unintentionally is caused by an error of sorts in the machine in our head. The commands come from there. Why then is it so hard for many of us to accept that our sight and imagination areas are likely to make mistakes too. There is a continuous flow of information back and forth in both directions between the eyes, our seeing areas of the mind and our imagination and processing parts. We therefore need to determine whether the information was seen, imagined, or contrived. Most of the time this all works well, but when fatigue sets in, more errors are bound to be made in terms of what we perceive to be real or imaginary.

Nothing that we do is consistently accurate. Our perception of time can be manipulated, time seems to slow down during a car crash for instance. We get the order of events muddled as we lay down memories in an incorrect sequence. Hocus pocus is generated by our mind's frequent errors of perception. The unwillingness to consider likely explanations for occasional oddities that we experience leads to a whole host of crazy conjectures. Our sight system is as perfect as any camera, and we never inaccurately interpret what enters our eyes. If only that were the case, we would never have courtroom battles about eyewitnesses and contrary evidence produced by technology. If you want to see ghosts for real, all you need do is stay awake for a couple of days and the dreams will play out hallucinogenically whilst awake. They will overlay on top of the normal reality.

Regular habits lay down strong pathways in our mind and a blip in the routine can cause a mental re-enactment moments before doing it once again. The prediction of what you are about to do so closely timed with the event is named *Déjà vu*. When you think of a friend you have more than just their name and image of their face stored. You have other associations embedded also such as time points, smells, and pictorial features. When one of these associations are brought to the fore you may then think of your friend. Therefore, it should not be that astonishing if that person pays you a visit or phones you soon after. A subconscious prediction was made. If you analyse it closely you may notice that that person has a particular habit albeit one that is not easily identifiable at first sight. Hence "I was just thinking about you and then you called me."

Risk and Luck



You can worry about this, worry about that, worry yourself so much that you don't want to get out of bed in the morning. Though, there is good reason to worry about getting up for the number of accidents people have putting their trousers on is unbelievable. Risk is about pay off and impediment. Wearing a seatbelt reduces the damage and chance of death immensely but doesn't spoil the fun of the drive that much. As for pay off, those that jump from a balcony near a pool and miss the water create fantastic anecdotes for those witnessing it. Most will forget your name and simply describe the comical angles of the bones protruding through your skin. The ones that die or survive in a vegetative state add to the hidden, out of sight out of mind tally.

Out of sight, out of mind

At the end of every sentence in these pages there are full stops. They were put there to represent the people that come to an end that we don't notice much. If you die in a car accident you are the full stop. If you die of something else equally mundane you are another full stop. However, were you to die along with fifty others in a plane crash, a train crash, a fire or more importantly in a novel way you will make the news. I say make the news, you personally are unlikely to get a mention, but the event will. No matter what the cause of death, even very old age, it only gets a lot of attention if you are famous or infamous. Then you can have a red circle on the plate above. I find it all rather crass, all people are valid to me. And by the way the newsworthiness is very much dependant on the nationality of those in peril. Poor citizens have much less significance than the rich ones.

If you take a walk down the high street of your town you see plenty of people out and about. There may be a few in

wheelchairs or struggling to get around, but on the whole people seem alive and well. What you don't see so much, is all the people too ill to leave home or laid up in hospital. It gives a false impression that all things are alright. Many people are once again hidden away, out of sight and out of mind. Whilst traveling we stayed in someone's house, a bedsit of sorts. It was very nice, they cooked great meals and told us a lot about the area. One evening I took the plates into the kitchen and found that they had a 'child', maybe in their early twenties sitting in a wheelchair. Unable to talk properly but with some communication skills of sorts. I don't think they left the house very often.

Fate

For something to be predictable, absolutely certain, then the position, orientation and trajectory of all the objects in the vicinity would need to be known. This would include things moving at the speed of light heading over too. Objects are vibrating, dancing, and oscillating about. Any object you measure will have rounding errors, approximations which can make the difference between it heading left or right in a collision. The numbers involved are beyond huge. Instead of predictability we have probability. Randomness with most reliable statistical chance of a certain outcome.

On top of the rounding errors, we encounter a data problem when simulating the environment to make a prediction. You need hundreds of atoms to store the data regarding each atom you are tracking. Treating say a tennis ball as one object rather than a collection of gazillions of atoms introduces more errors that can count in the real world. Fate is a nonsense.

How can we explain away fate? It sure seems that we were fated to meet, fated to get a job, and fated to die young. The job one is easy, you have interests in a certain field, preferences, and notice vacancies with your curiosity mechanism. As for meeting someone, you draw on the probability process. Those who stay in their bedroom everyday encounter very few people. Some become so ill they end up having a nurse pay a daily visit who then falls for them. For the rest, to increase the chance of romance blossoming they can tidy themselves up, upping the probability of a match. We can go out, and out, and out, and that raises the likelihood of 'bumping' into a potential partner. We can smile, appear happy and be a someone that people want to be with. We can give fate a chance.

Early deaths befall some of the most beautiful people, many of which never paid much attention to the main risks that lurk unnoticed around them. Did you pay attention to your bald tyre and realise that it will blow soon? It leaves you at the mercy of it happening in a benign manner or it directing you towards

Could my fate be at the mercy of an insect flapping its wings in a distant land? No, or to be precise, unlikely. Anything of significance has tipping points. A huge number of insects need to be on the move to get anyway near such tipping points. There are buffers that absorb and discount the effect of the tiny life-form's activities.

Statistics can sour our perceptions of risk. An accident hurts. We can suffer in hideous ways. It takes a long time to heal, and we might not be the same after. Lots fear dying in a certain way rather than dying per se. Climbing ladders can have a far higher casualty rate than drowning inside a tunnel beneath the sea, but what do some fear the most?

The probability of reaching old age unscathed is lower than you might expect. If one in a thousand of us fall victim to some calamity or another each year, then over twenty years each person could have a one in fifty chance of suffering the same fate. If you add up all the various potential perils, then it can look quite alarming. The one recourse is to invest in ourselves. Examine the main pitfalls. Focus on the big risks. Don't be lazy. I will spend ten minutes tying off a ladder so that it will not slip sideways. I spend extra on a good diet. We think nothing of spending a fortune on getting an education, but many will scrimp on quality food.

Medical risks

People ignore the detrimental side effects of most medications, and all hospital treatments have risk attached. For many it is a one-way ticket. This is one of many areas where the risk is out of our control and bothers us. We know the dangers of driving but if we are at the wheel, we see it as a part of our own destiny.

Things become the norm, standard practice and we don't always look at alternatives. People have blood transfusions and sneer at those that refuse them. People recover sometimes, despite having them, not always because they did. You could be given the wrong type no matter how good the procedures are in place. Mistakes are always possible. Screening is not infallible for you could get diseased or tainted blood. Having a procedure done without a transfusion carries a risk but it is sometimes slightly lower than with it. Maybe 6% of people die or have major complications having had it compared with 4% of people who don't have it. There may come a time when automation reduces the risk considerably and alien blood is no longer a problem, it is simply an example where we accept things as they are. Ways of doing things go full circle. The ancients suggested we take a long rest to recover. We learnt more, so started to intervene right away. Then we reverted to 'stabilise, then wait a while before operating further'.

It took one person and a lot of convincing to change the way people with club feet were treated. People in poorer regions were the most susceptible to this problem and had the least money to do anything about it. The sufferers were not just stigmatised but had obvious difficulties walking and working. In richer nations the doctors would do highly complex, lengthy operations on patients. The operations were expensive and traumatic. People became accustomed to letting talented surgeons handle it. It was considered wonderful that these procedures could be done. However, one individual heard of another way and went to investigate. Rather than slice open the legs, break the bones, and set them straight they found that they could be bound against a stick and forced into a straight position. By binding and gradually tightening, over the months the legs and feet would straighten out very well indeed. Not only is this much less invasive it is a something that can be carried out at near zero cost anywhere. It doesn't have the problems with aftercare and infections. The moral of the story is that having blind faith in the way things are done sometimes closes us off from exploring simpler less risky alternatives. Having said this, we might have come across the placebo effect or wish to try alternative medicines. They are all well and good for some but do not have the power of great research and study that accepted medicinal practices do. On that note you can't think yourself better but positivity and having a lot to live for will aid a recovery.

Patterns

Neat gardens, neat piles and tidiness can preoccupy our minds. The attraction to neatness, most of us suffer from it. Helpful to some degree. Think about your cutlery. Some will throw it all in a box and fish out what they want when they need it. Others prefer a draw with separate compartments for the knives, forks, spoons, and other cooking utensils. It makes it easier to see what you have and locate things quickly. I tell you; philosophy is about the everyday and those making it seem more than that are leading you astray. As for our obsession with making things neat is it fashion, following what others do, or derived from the way nature creates patterns?

We see patterns in data which can provide clues to what is going on or make us believe that something is noteworthy. 5 4 0 2 5 6 5 4 5 4 1 6 7 1 4 3 1 4 1 7 8 7 6 4 8 7 7 9 4 1 2 3 4 5 6 4 5 7 7 0 7 0 7 5 4 0 9 0. A glance at these numbers leads some to think they have found something, something that has meaning. Any series of six numbers might be equally relevant. It jumps out as we have this ability to assess neatness. Curiosity has a neatness function for it highlights things that stand out. One black grain of sand dents a

creamy beige beach. Curiosity spots it and there is an urge to rectify it.

Games and gambling

I spent a while studying betting on horses and dogs to see if there was a formula for making a profit. There was a way, but it meant limiting the bets to about ten races a year when the odds are in your favour - small fields, no jumps, non-handicap, top racecourses, and good ground. What I found was that the pundits and the punters were good at selecting the winners. Too good, excessively lowering the odds the bookmakers offered on the horses that were most likely to win.

I want to talk about overround as I spent a lot of time on it, and it feels a shame not to write something on the subject. It makes the difference between making a profit – which very few do, making a small loss – a fee for the entertainment and losing lots of money. Bookmakers have an overround, casinos a rake and lotteries take a massive slab for worthy causes. If we bet on heads or tails, we could be given 2 for each win but lose 1 if the coin doesn't land in our favour. You could bet on both heads and tails and come out losing nothing, winning nothing. Equally you could place proportional sized bets on all the horses in the race and lose a percentage, the overround. Bookmakers are there to make a profit hence will always try to keep the overround above 1. The higher the overround the less you get when you win. The winnings cover less of the losses on other races that you bet on.

The more runners in a race the easier it is to hide the size of the overround. The lower the prestigiousness of the racecourse the more low-income hapless people you have placing tiddly bets hence the overround needs to be high to make it worthwhile. A handicap race is designed to even out the field, not at all good for a professional punter. Jumping over hedges is exciting but your horse will pull up or chuck the rider off too often. All in all, the market for making money is limited. The same can be said for stock markets. You need to be picky to reduce the losses.

People claim to have systems. None have been shown to work. The classic system; keep raising your bet each time you lose to cover the last string of losses suffered. This works if you have billions in the bank and the bookmaker will accept the huge bets. Believe me you can get long losing runs, 50 in a row. That is the thing with randomness, it can produce long strings of the same number or long strings without a number.

What do we have for those that want a dream, a wish to escape the drudgery and are far too lazy to build it? We have the lottery. We insist on giving it a shot, even though we know that in any given week we can be a hundred times more likely to perish than

win. Saying 'you have to be in it to win it' gets more to play and ramps up the top prize.

People assume all card games are gambling. How wrong they are. Luck will be intertwined but over the long course of play those with the most skill and patience lose the least. A tiddly number actually make from it, enough to service a good lifestyle. They are few and far between though. People exaggerate their wins. Few keep an honest tally of the losses and expenses.

The fruit machine effect is a huge trap. You keep feeding it as you believe it will soon pay out. The more you have put in the closer you think you are to getting a jackpot. Every spin costs you a certain amount, typically about 20% depending on how shrewd the machine owner is. These machines work in the same way as you might wait and wait for a bus, wishing more and more that you had walked away, clenching on to the hope one will turn up.

The outcome for stealing in the steal or share game, is all the prize or nothing. The outcome for sharing is half or nothing. If you only get the chance to play this game once in your lifetime, you may act differently to when you get to play once a week. If you play regularly, the co-operation strategy is the most fruitful in the long run. It requires you to forget about the times that you were suckered and ignore the temptation to make any reprisals. People however do not operate by logic; they use emotional attachments and gauge the trustworthiness of the other players. They will share in some circumstances and not others. The idea of such games for study is fundamentally flawed by the complexities of human nature.

The problem with running models on behaviour is that dreadful assumptions are made. We overlook the issue of converting an idea to a number. Five people are not five people, one is obese, one is blue eyed, one has an arm amputated, one is pregnant the other is normal like me. If you see the sign that says max 6 persons and the lift has five massive people in it, are you tempted to take the stairs this once?

People enjoy sharing, they enjoy doing one another favours because they like to. Not because they want something in return and not because of any subconscious duty. People do not always consider that being a 'sucker' is detrimental. Many animals including humans find that helping one another is rewarding, sometimes more so than helping yourself. People will say, "I got more enjoyment giving it away than I ever would spending it on myself." Selfishness is a double-edged sword with the greater true gain made when giving in so many cases. Sometimes you can help others and you feel as though they really appreciate what you have done. In other cases, helping out lands you in trouble. It can be a bit off putting but we tend to keep on doing it. We do

not co-operate to help us survive we co-operate as it is joyous. You can't place a number on that.

Losing

The first time I visited a casino I got bored, so put my remaining chips on number 23. It came in. Unbelievable. I cashed out and never played roulette again. Not so for others. Winning on their first trip can be a hook towards addiction. "Money won is twice as sweet as money earned." We are all addicts. Some of us are in denial. Put your hands up and admit it. Seek help if you want to live differently.

We need to learn to lose before we learn to win. One way of increasing the joy you give to a winner is to get in a tantrum and show annoyance. Rather than mentally beating yourself up about any loss, you can use it as an opportunity to see room for improvement in your game. Think about what you did right. In many games you will have done a lot more right than wrong even though in life small mistakes can hand victory to your opponent. Whether it is a game or a business loss, we can laugh it off and move on. Few succeed until they experience the pain of a significant loss. Losing small bets has no real impact. Those with money have made a lot, lost a lot along the way and care less about money than those without. Oh boy the money I have lost in business is frightening. Then when profits came torrenting in, the government put out a hand to take a portion. I filled a bucket for them, then a drum then what seemed like a reservoir. It was all gladly handed over to them and spent wisely, fully accountably, thanking me with investigations and compliance checks recurrently.

War

At almost all times throughout recorded history there have been people engaged in a war of some sort somewhere in the world. Perhaps only three in each hundred years have there been total peace in all nations. However, looking at it another way, you will find that the majority of people across the globe have not been participating in any fighting for most of the time. Most individuals are simply not interested or prepared to fight one another. Most of us respect other people's desire to live and have no wish to kill. The cause of the fighting? Sometimes religion, but more often it is to dominate land and resources.

The action of killing somebody is hard for most. Some do become accustomed to it. We can kill by dropping a bomb or firing an artillery shell from afar or experience the much greater personal intensity during hand to hand combat. There are a small number of people who become very proficient. They may even enjoy killing and furthermore suffer no problems afterwards. These characters blazed the trail wiping out anything that got in the way. However, these people only account for something like 2% of the population. Huge numbers of soldiers have returned home having never fired a single shot, let alone at someone. Many fired their guns too high, over the heads of the opposition on purpose.

In modern armies, soldiers go through rigorous training programs to get an automatic reaction when under fire. When battles commence the training takes over and normal behaviour is set aside. Without this training most would be hopelessly ineffectual, but no matter how much training is given beforehand, dealing with the aftermath is never easy for everyone. Many soldiers have been severely traumatised by their experience, which has often led to suicide or a troubled life afterwards. Visualisation techniques can help a determined person to overcome the awful memories to some degree, but this is an area few armies concern themselves with.

Those unaccustomed to the dreadful nature of real-life horror scenes may think that they would never do much harm to another. However, it doesn't take long for many a kind person to transform into a pernicious individual. Two key ingredients are required. One being the authority from up high, someone respected in command. The other being in an environment away from normal life. Captors have been left in charge of prisoners both in war zones and in artificial experiments and the results have been deplorable. Within a few days the behaviour of those left in charge spirals downwards into a malicious contemptible affray. If someone broke into your home at night and attacked

your family, you could become far more aggressive and protective than normal. Your reaction would be surprising, even to yourself, when reviewed in the calm days later. With the right incentive and the push from an authority figure we can be turned from a pacifist into a very mean individual fairly quickly.

Killing in the heat of battle is markedly different to terminating someone's life in cold blood. We can be haunted more from seeing someone dying in front of us when it is done in a cold calculated way. Those in a firing squad can see the pain, anguish on the face and terror in the eyes of the victim. The commanders are aware of this so will often have the person blindfolded or shot from behind.

The ideal war is one where there is such overwhelming force bearing down on the troublemakers that they capitulate and give up without a fight. A significant aspect of war comes down to bravado and threat rather than aiming to kill. There have been many battles where thousands of people took part, but only a few died. Armies enjoy making a lot of noise and create threatening actions in the hope that the other side disperses or surrenders. In many battles it can be the perceived superiority rather than the actual strength that allows one side to achieve victory. Hence why the garish uniforms, drums and ineffectual but frightening looking equipment made earlier armies look formidable. Elephants have been used to charge at the enemy. They were somewhat effective except many turned around and ran back at those that sent them into the melee. Gas too had a habit of harming those that released it when there was an unexpected change in wind direction.

If you can't defeat the opposition head on, then endurance is key. Whoever can keep the effort up for longest prevails. Hit and run guerrilla tactics over long periods of time also wear out all but the most patient fighting forces in the end.

One clown remarked that it was two years in the making and ten minutes in the undoing. The quote refers to the time taken to train large groups of fighters and the speed at which they were annihilated during a minimally productive assault. The element missing from this portrayal is the twenty years or so of dedication, sacrifice and commitment made by their parents. The pregnancy, the years of weaning, the slog mixed within the fun and reward of nurturing each of these individuals. The investment made in each of us is huge. To be a pawn in somebody else's game, to have a bead of lead dismember a vital part of our body is not the same as being unfortunate in one's own premeditated risky adventure. All that structure that took years of arranging and refining is lost in an instant. Everything right down to the spelling tests that your teachers insisted was so important to do well at.

Whether it is through war or accident the exasperation of losing someone whom we have devoted so much attention to is never easy to come to terms with. Solace might be found in cherishing the memories of the time shared and a life cut short is still bountiful. Those with loved ones still intact may consider what could be if a warning is ignored. We need reminders from time to time to stay grateful and make attempts to tear down any barriers created through petty feuds. It is noteworthy though how people in a country rally around and help each other before or whilst an enemy is attacking. Most personal differences are set aside, and communities get together and share the common problem. Then go back to petty feuds after it all calms down. However, a few unpopular people in the community 'disappear' as law and order is replaced by confusion and mayhem.

Risk in war

It can be hard enough to accept casualties caused by the opposition, but how does one come to terms with friendly fire? (A rather inapt expression that hides the lack of due diligence before pulling a trigger.) In some wars more succumbed to disease than enemy fire. There are instances where people can be more at risk from some jeopardy at home than in the location of war. It panned out that for each 100,000 people that went to a war, 99,500 returned safely whereas 600 would have perished in the same time frame in their home country. Although it would have been a different set of people.

We have wars to preserve our home, our country, to expand our nation's territory and to help other countries. We view the merits of each very differently. Weighing up the possible risk to yourself is hard to do as severe injury, mental scarring and obvious death is balanced against the reasons for combat. Most people will admit that they would protect themselves and their immediate family by whatever means necessary. Many people will show gratitude towards those that have defended their country from invaders. Similar appreciation has been shown by those that have appealed to other nations to intervene in their state when people have used force to circumvent and override the laws and voting systems that were in place. People are far more likely to seek redress when life in their country is heavily restricted and unrewarding. If a state feels that they want a defensive capability, they are perhaps more justified building one with non-coerced volunteers.

Where an organisation has not got a big army or much in the way of military apparatus yet has a strong reason to fight for their principles, they are inclined to act in what is termed terrorism. The loose definition is an act of extreme violence that is unapproved of by the big states. The main purpose is to elevate

the cause above the many other events on that day. The news is most often comprised of things that are new, things that are out of the ordinary. When the media plays into the hands of the agitators, they increase the weight of the message and heighten tensions. If such events are downplayed, then support will drop. Only if the frustration of not being heard rises and rises and therefore action is taken to raise the ante significantly, does this policy become risky. Most of the attacks get blanket coverage. The length of debate and discussion is disproportionate to the scale of it in the wider scheme of things. An earthquake and other natural disasters can wipe out hundreds or even thousands of people in one go. Preventable curable diseases eradicate millions every year. Use of legal guns and knives destroy lives daily. Add in the preventable fatalities on the road and the hate wars claim less than 0.01% of the total. If the people in power act in a way that gives the same precedence to all citizens, then the resources would be deployed in a much more even-handed way. No one life is more important than another.

When you have virtually nothing to lose the fear evaporates, as death could seem more attractive than a suppressed futile life. The most dangerous parties to keep a close eye on are those coerced and sucked into doing something through false promises and become a patsy in someone else's game. Those that change their mind, those that aren't swayed look back years later and are invariably glad they avoided an early death.

A fiend is killing everyone in the immediate locality. Selfish vs cooperative tactics come into force. Rush the fiends or hide? If lots run at them smashing them hard with anything they can lay their hands on, they are usually overpowered. The temptation is to get away and hide though. If the fiend can kill you all one by one, they will kill you one by one. If not all of you then most of you. The more that challenge the fiend together the merrier the occasion – it is very hard to stave off lots of people coming at you all at the same time. A difficult once in a lifetime gamble.

To sacrifice your life for the benefit of others could be admirable but you won't be around to appreciate any of the gains of the eventual victory. Is it worse to die in a war that your side ends up losing anyway? From your point of view, it makes no difference. It is only important whether the war is won or lost if you survive.

Body

You can spend an eternity studying the health benefits of various foodstuffs and worry yourself silly about all the harm some things are supposed to do. Balance is everything. If you are already eating a good variety, by that we mean not too much or too little of the same foodstuffs then you can skip this chapter. There is rarely any need for supplementary pills as many won't be absorbed by the body in the same way as food anyway. You need not concern yourself with the ins and outs of eating what some may call junk food so long as you avoid getting such meals from the same place more than once a week. Junk food is not always bad per se for what it contains, but for what it doesn't contain.

The ills of too little: Make no mistake about it, plants do not grow as tall, have yellowing leaves and look rather listless if even one essential mineral is not available in their plot. People have come close to death self-experimenting, where they denied themselves vital-amines. So simple logic will tell us that the greater the variety in our diet the more chance we have of getting all the nutrients that we need to maintain our bodies. The beautiful thing about this broad-varied-diet approach is that you do not need to spend any time analysing what you eat. Even munching a small amount of salad, vegetables, fruit, and other things that doesn't taste too great can make the world of difference with little pain. We tend to follow the habits of our parents and can pass some failings down the generations. You might need to find the gall to stop rejecting foods that are actually quite palatable. There will be things you do not like, but there will be plenty of alternatives that provide the right mix. It is unlikely that every green item is 'disgusting'. Young children will quite happily eat chocolate turds but look at them as being revolting a few years later as they adopt the same disgusts as their parents. Eat for you and your longevity. I do not like the taste of carrots, not at all, but I always eat a few chunks. Get them down and be done with it.

The damage of too much: Eating too much of something can wreak havoc to essential parts of our body. We can tolerate a certain amount of toxicity but go over the limit and we are liable to do some permanent damage. We will rarely eat enough of one poison to get a lethal dose at the one sitting. However, a few μg consumed over and over can build up if your body doesn't get the time to deal with it and can't flush it out faster than it is streaming in. Hence eating anything over and over ends up being disastrous for our health and well-being. People have died eating too many carrots or drinking too much water, items that are generally considered to be good for you.

A variety reduces the probability of damaging your organs through overdose. It gets as close as possible to guaranteeing that you get enough of what you need. The simplicity of the diverse diet allows for a few wayward habits, after all there is a claim that happier people live longer than miserable ones. You can compensate by sticking to buying more natural foods like real bread, brown rather than blanched white and less processed foods. Don't be a cheapskate, food is medicine buy the best where you can. A life free of illness is priceless. Particular attention to what you eat must be made during pregnancy if you want your offspring to live longer. They will be much less hassle to you if built near as possible to the intended design. Anything you make without the essential ingredients becomes a bodge job.

There may well be more nutrition in the cereal box than the cereal inside. The cereal has the husk and wheatgerm removed. The fibre and much of the nutrients are stolen. This spurs the idea of eating the whole. If you apply this wisdom to eating apples and rhubarb you may encounter some toxicity though. Rhubarb has poisonous leaves, and the core of an apple may not be as well received as the flesh. If you decide to eat the said cereal box, you may be unhappy to discover that since we began all the virtuous recycling, over and over, the levels of noxious chemicals have steadily increased. Most unpleasant as they leach from the box through the bag into the food inside. When we think we are doing some good we always disregard the downsides.

Where do you draw the line when it comes to avoiding the problems with food? Some wash rice with boiling water after it is cooked to rinse out more of the arsenic. I am sure you could make a list of countless dangers, so once again the not too much, not too often comes into play again.

Regular meetings in a group can provide the impetus to stay on course with eating less. We may shed a small amount quite quickly but keeping it off is no mean feat. Regular exercise is vital for our fitness, but also to alleviate boredom. We become trapped in a vicious circle. The heavier we become the more effort it is to move about, resulting in us doing less. The more we sit about the more we are tempted to indulge. I will make this simple. You do not have to read a single further guide. This is common sense, easy to understand and as basic as it can be. Eat less. If you are twice the size of a normal person, eat half as much as you are now.

The body has a certain amount of elasticity with fat cells filling up like a balloon. When over stretched, they split into two and the body's capacity rises. You then have more fat cells to manage, making you liable to move up to the next weight bracket, staying there unless serious intervention is taken. Hence all the thin

people will tell you to avoid getting fat in the first place. How large you have become is usually your concern and yours alone, but overweight people place a heavy burden on the rest. The one advantage of not being overweight can be summed up in one word: Agility. And agility is a huge positive. There is nothing good about getting old, nor is there anything positive about being fat.

Variety is paramount but note; Two groups of people. One group had a selection of sandwiches. A large range. Many different fillings on offer. The other group had just one option. The group with the variety ate twice as many as those with no variety. The bigger the buffet with more options on offer, the more trying it is for those inclined to obesity. Use smaller plates. Make sure people have to get up and walk for more. It is no use having a minuscule plate if there is a mound of food on the table to easily top it up with. Sensible amounts of a variety is the aim.

Sticking to plants

Eating an animal that is very close to the end of its natural life seems less uncaring than slaughtering one before it has had any chance of experiencing the world fully. People have proposed that we have both the mental capacity to show compassion to animals and refrain from killing them for food. There is a thought that we can manage quite well with a diet that leaves them out. Lions and tigers, whales and sharks don't have this luxury.

Some people keep their meat consumption down to a minimum, as they see it as doing their bit. Others avoid all animal products most commonly for ethical reasons. There are potential health benefits so long as your diet includes all the things that animal products provide. I personally prefer to pay more for meat if the welfare of the animals is improved, even if it means paying double and having less. Animals wish to live an enthralling life just as we do. Some pay no attention to this or come to terms with it in some way. People like the taste so much that they reason that the protein it provides outweighs the suffering. There is a definitive primal bout of satisfaction when chewing meat. It is a contentious issue with emotions running high, for and against.

In practice it is near impossible to omit animal by-products from your diet completely. Milk production causes significant harm and misery towards animals. It is in all kinds of things such as bread, cakes, sweets, and chocolate. It is difficult to avoid. Imagine giving birth and having your offspring taken away from you after three short days. Cows get distressed by this as any parent would.

We can be equally disrespectful and uncaring in the way we cause misery to pets. Some are stored in tiny boxes that get way too hot in the summer and ice cold in the winter. We forget that dogs are pack animals and isolated for our pleasure not theirs. The causal

nature in which we interfere with the bodies of animals for our convenience upsets real animal lovers. We neuter, dock, geld at our leisure as it makes it easier for us. We treasure our curiosity and rewards in life and prefer it if our pets stop roaming, exploring, and enjoying life. Hence the third drive applies as always, selfishness. A pet cat will probably eat something like a thousand chickens or equivalent in its lifetime. The ratio of death to sustain life is even greater for its adopted provider and if it keeps you happy then that is all that matters.

I saw a youngster depicted in a cartoon that was being vocal about the rights and wrongs of eating animals. They met an elder who spoke eloquently about leading by example rather than being too great an activist. Activism can put an end to torturous practices that have been kept hidden. Activism is most hypocritical when those voicing an opinion have not got their own house in order. Are you squeaky clean yourself? Can we justify complaining about others when parts of our own life shows ambivalence. I doubt anyone's life is lived without it being to the detriment of some animals somewhere. This doing your bit is insufficient to come across as so magnanimous. Each item of meat we eat is another bite of hurt. Thus, each item we decline is a move in the other direction.

Damage

Same father same mother but each child made is a not quite the same. It would be possible to have twins born years apart if the exact same mitosis gene muddling occurred. Our blueprints are constantly being copied, sometimes incorrectly. Hence, identical twins are never completely identical. Things we are exposed to in our environment, pollution, radiation damage us. Nevertheless, poor diets are the most widespread cause of poor body development. Insufficient nutrients at the very least mean we grow to a lower height than what would be the case had we got the required food. You are what you eat.

As mankind has 'progressed' it has been drawn towards things that smell 'nice and fresh'. We spray things with fangled chemical signatures that fool us into thinking it is pleasant. One lemony scented item is not likely to do you much harm. However, as we become exposed to more and more of them the chance of a health issue rises. A chemical cocktail. It is hard to avoid all exposure. We can reduce it. We can squirt the minimum amount of scented juices under our arms once a week when it is really needed instead of every day. We can use simple basic cleaning products. Use less, worry less.

Balls drop, periods start, hair begins to grow. All of a sudden, all sorts of changes occur. One day you hear a low gruff voice reverberating in the house. Who has paid us a visit? A voice has

broken overnight. This is a bit startling. When a seemingly normal child has other transformations that appear like everything has gone awry, we look for a cause. Was it something in the environment, something we gave them to eat or caused by a recent injection? It may well be, but if it is something that was predetermined in the genes it is often the last thing we look to blame. The genome has trigger points.

The joy of a bed

Our well-being can be drastically affected when we don't get the right amount of quality sleep. Those who are unable to go to sleep at all, die within a few weeks. It is a period where the mind is still active, condensing and sorting information gathered during the time awake. All those conversations whittled down and purged.

If you are touched whilst you are asleep, this interrupt may become an aspect of your dreams. On the whole you are pretty much oblivious to what is going on around you. This has a likeness to when you pass away. While you are fast asleep, billions of others are beavering away.

Getting off to sleep can be a struggle for some. I find it very hard if I have any kind of dialogue going on in my head. If you start considering what you want to say and imagine their probable responses, you are likely to be doing so well into the night. Thus, we can say to ourselves that this issue, these thoughts can be dealt with tomorrow, no need to think about them right now.

Do you judge people by the hour in which they prise themselves out of bed? Are late risers lazy, and early ones schemers? During spells of working late, well past midnight, I would not get up very early and people were keen to admonish me for it. People also think that you can adjust your body clock to anytime that you want. Try getting up three hours earlier than normal. Most get a feeling of utter inner tiredness as their body temperature remains out of sync. There is a notable difference between fitting in with a society and following the same precise pattern as the headstrong goaders. You do the same just in a different order or at a different time in the day.

Dreams are sometimes related to the goings on in our life. I was plagued by nightmares for years that revolved around a small horror then a bigger one and so on. It was years later that I realised these correlated to some small mistake or large thing I had done wrong. The fear of failure and pressure from inflexible characters. Only a new life away from the stress of the situation allowed these to fade. My bad dreams haven't stopped completely, but they take a different form to this and only occur when too hot or when excessively spiced food was eaten late in the evening. The worst is when you are semi-awake but can't

move. At the back of the neck there is a shut off mechanism and if that is not switched fully you have a frustrating few minutes of trying to re-engage the body.

The less pleasant dreams are dwarfed by the rather marvellous ones where you can fly high and move in ways that reality can't compete with. No mention of the personal encounters with imaginary folk need writing about apart from to say that they were as good as those in everyday life. The frequent dreams of being in elevators trying hopelessly to get to a desired level, sometimes using some stairs as a get around, don't seem to have any notable point. Lifts that move sideways and in manners outside of typical engineering possibilities add to the experience. Some might say that is because you are trying to go up in life or find workarounds but as they say that to everyone their dream analysis is probably dreamt up.

Pain

Got pain take pill. Got pain take nothing for it and monitor it subside. It is only pain. Six fillings, no anaesthetic, and no day long grogginess after. Some enjoy pain, particularly that that accompanies childbirth. Why does it have to be something to dread and shy away from in this instance? Feel it. A pill to alleviate the cause of the pain is distinct from a pill to hide and mask the pain. One thing I learned the hard way is not stopping immediately after an injury. Get yourself out of further danger then rest and rest. The pain is a warning. To be heeded. A pain killer denies you a sense. The sense to stop carrying on doing more damage. You have ripped most of the fibres. A few more steps and you will rip them all. It is not all simple, however. I have worked through, pushed through discomfort to rebuild, and improve muscle strength. It was not long after that the discomfort dissipated. Some sit and sit and sit and that leads to an early grave. We can use pain for what it is for, to alert us to the problem and work out the best solution.

One pain I had to deal with was heartburn. A capful of apple cider vinegar made it ten times worse for a few seconds but seems to be a good cure. This may only work for me and me alone, but simple remedies are a thorn in the side of those wishing to profit from medicines. They can be embraced without trying to make all expensive treatments redundant. We can look at solutions case by case and utilise the best of both worlds. Having faith that we can manage all illnesses with simple cures and placebos can be damaging. Likewise, it is equally misleading to assert that we can only treat things by spending a fortune. Each case is different.

The only way

"You either know it all or have a hole in your argument."

I decided to stick my neck out, a few millimetres, and make a proposition about the nature of being. It is audacious I suppose. I suspect most philosophers have at least pondered about us and the universe. Rather than accept that some things are beyond our comprehension, I offer up a semi-plausible explanation of how things are. Conveying difficult concepts using simple words is challenging. I want you to think in ways you might not have thought of before. You can take this all as either bold, arrogant, or plain daft. Nevertheless, at least it is a valid attempt.

People talk about there being many dimensions, the fourth being time and then the 5th, 6th, 7th and so on. Instead of all that hyperbole you can settle on just one dimension and nothing more whatsoever. One problem with multi-dimensional thinking is that it does not stack up in reality. It is like saying my cat ate my house. We can visualise a cat eating a whole house from the front door to the chimney and every brick, but it is a cartoonish idea and never possible. We have a capability to conjure up mad ideas in our mind that have no basis in the physical world.

Can you have a two-dimensional object? Can you hand me a two-dimensional object? No, you can't. If it is to be 2D then it will have zero thickness and hence will not exist. If it is assumed to be infinitely thin, then it has a thickness and thus is 3D. The same goes with 1D. People struggle to escape the architects view of the world. Up is up no matter what you say. But your up is down to those on the other side of the world and sideways for those living halfway around from you. What is consistent is that up is always away from the centre of the earth no matter where you are pontificating from. Each object is a set defined distance from all other objects. Change the relative distances and the object's position has moved. If you turn the whole universe upside down it makes no difference, nobody will notice. Turn an object over and the top gets closer to some things and further away from others.

As you read this, the top of the book is say one metre from the door, one metre from the floor and a whole range of distances from everything in the room. Turn the book over and all those distances change. Each object, each atom, every item in the universe is a certain distance, a relative distance, from one another. You may roll, pitch, slide up, slide sideways, slide forwards or yaw the book. Objects have six freedoms of movement. But and this is a big but, they are only human interpretations. Any movement made by the book simply changes

the relative distances between the top/bottom of the book and all the other objects in the room and the universe.

We can use a distance measuring tool to work out where you are on Earth by working out the distance you are from devices floating in space. Get a signal from four of them and the position is quite accurate. You do not move up, left, right forward and backwards you move nearer or further away from other objects. When you climb the stairs, you don't walk five steps forward and ten up, you move diagonally away from the bottom. Whilst nothing changes apart from the mental mapping, you no longer think in terms of three planes of movement but see it as items being a set of straight line distances apart. So, the 3D representation still works but there is nothing other than a single arena of space. We do not live in a three-dimensional universe. There are no dimensions. Dimensions only exist in our imagination. Objects are a relative distance apart.

Time is not a fourth dimension but another human abstract. It is just a measure of rotations or oscillations of an object. We see something turn and once a certain number of revolutions has been made, another object moves from one point to another. It is all relative with some covering a greater relative distance than others and hence they are described as moving faster.

Time has historically been derived in part from the rotation of the earth. Hours and minutes, subdivisions of one rotation, using convenient numbers such as 60 which can be handily divided by lots of numbers; 2,3,4,5,6,10,12,15,20,30 to make half hour, twenty minutes, quarter hour and so forth. Metric time would be awkward. A hundred minutes cannot be divided so well. Anyway, put two super accurate clocks side by side, synchronise them, then take one on a journey. When they return next to each other the time displayed differs. Add this to the fact that the earth is gradually slowing down making each year a little longer and it begins to tell you something.

Time is invaluable for approximating things, vital for issuing speeding tickets, wonderful considering that we are travelling at over 600 miles an hour when standing still. Spinning around, orbiting the sun in a galaxy on the move. It is perfectly acceptable to ascribe us as being static with everything else moving around us. We thought that the earth was at the centre of the universe, then thought that we orbited the sun and then realised that both are true according to your standpoint. Time spanning the universe can speed up and slow down and there will be no way of knowing as there will be nothing to compare it with. The oscillations in your timepiece would adjust in line with all else. The relative speed of light appears to be constant when measured

in a vacuum. Whether it is the same when surrounded by a huge mass is hard to ascertain.

True atoms

A long time ago someone thought about what would happen if we kept breaking things down into ever smaller pieces. They proposed that eventually you would reach a point where something could not be broken down any further. They named these indivisible pieces atoms. As science moved forward these atoms became known as elements, each having more mass as they went down the periodic table from hydrogen the lightest through gold to uranium and so on. It then became apparent that each element was made of up of sub-atomic particles which have been named protons, neutrons, and electrons. However, these were found to be made up of even smaller parts. As the term atom has been hijacked for the intermediate size particles that we call elements, the piece that was originally thought of as the smallest possible can be referred to as a true atom.

Elements have a formation of muons, electrons, gluons etc that are themselves clusters of true atoms. The quantity and arrangement of the true atoms dictate their properties. The true atom can be considered akin to a magnet with its poles attracting and repelling other like-minded entities. You can see that two can join together quite nicely like top and tailing in bed. Other arrangements with three, four and so on, bonded, create structure. The structure alters the behaviours. As these structures get more complex, they form the basis for separate parts that then lead on to constitute the neutron and proton.

This true atom is indivisible. It sits in its own spot interacting with all its neighbours near and far. Having the idea of a truly unbreakable core particle raises questions about what form, shape, and size it is. Is it like a ball, spherical or might it be flat like a sheet of paper or could it be looping string shaped? The problem with all these shapes is that they create an impression that they can be cut and divided. Then there is the problem of where the atom begins and where does it end? Is there some kind of boundary between two or more atoms? Thinking of it as a single minuscule point doesn't help either.

Every true atom interferes with every other true atom with decreasing magnitude the further apart they are. One effect is gravitational. Every atom in a big object like planet earth will attract every atom in the moon. This provides a clue to the form of true atoms. The atoms in your body are attracted to those in the earth and those in the moon even if the moon is on the other side of the earth to which you are standing. This implies that the force goes through countless atoms. Right through. The earth's gravity is not one big, combined force, rather, lots and lots of tiny

forces. Forces pass through a true atom and get interfered with along the way.

Each atom being derived from nothing gets a presence by borrowing like you borrow from a bank. The information can be borrowed but also repaid. The money in a bank is abstract and doesn't have any form, shape, or size but an account can go into deficit. You have a hole where the money came from and cash to spend. The key is to look at the true atom as having no real substance, no 'weight' so to speak. It is much more akin to a piece of information. Information with the properties of mass.

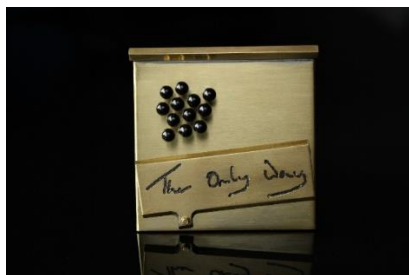
One property of mass is the resistance to change in motion. The more mass an object has the more force required to accelerate it. More effort to speed it up, slow it down or redirect it. Another property is the gravitational pull on all other masses. Each true atom interacts with one another. No true atom exists without the rest. Each individual true atom is defined by the effect it has on the others. Astronomers can spot a planet that is light years away, not by seeing it directly but by seeing the effect it has on the orbit of other larger objects. The same principle applies with true atoms. The centre of the true atom, the position of it is made by the balance point of where it interacts with the others. The point of greatest action. The true atom has no form, but **prescience** dictated by all the other atoms. It is a packet of information that interacts and behaves like something solid. It will resist getting too close to another, redirecting when close to impact.

The structure of multiple bonded true atoms brings about the effect of magnetism and electrostatic forces and so on. Countless configurations lead to structure and the electrochemical interfaces. Whilst the atom is referred to as information it is not to be likened to some simulation. Far from it. No magic, no relation to information in the software sense. Real as can be as each piece of information exists in an exact spot at a set distance, at that point from all the other bits of active informational chunks. Yet would be creatable from nothing. Untold numbers of atoms acting at a place relative to each other. No shape, no form, no substance nor actual solid matter, only the characteristics that we see and experience around us. A miasma of information. Looking at it this way does not alter the physical world around us, and the physics remains precisely the same. The universe is no simulation, for each atom is acting in its present spot. We are not holograms. Information takes on the behaviour of mass that we observe.

The nature and state of the true atoms creates tension, tension that can be released: energy. Bring certain structures together and the tension in the structures collapse forming a new combined structure and pressure to shift the position of other

true atoms. The potential for structures to change provides the will to force other structures to adopt new formations: energy transfer. The higher the relative speed of the true atoms the more they interfere when in close contact with other true atoms: temperature. Some structures will interact with others in relation to their relative movement or internal bouncing creating effects such as magnetism and radiating forces.

How each true atom behaves, how it creates structures is very finely balanced, self-balancing. The amount of force that it exhibits is crucial to the universe that results. That will always leave people open to a suggestion that something else is at play and that something devised it. One may presume that this one is more stable than other configurations. If you hypothetically change the values of the forces, things do not work the way they do now, everything falls apart.



The reason why the universe is how it is, is simple. There is no other way it can be. There are no other alternatives unless you throw out maths completely. If you say that a true atom is now to be 1.1 true atoms, then that is still one true atom. Looking at a collection of balls you can see that six fit around the centre one on a single plane or twelve if packed in all directions. There is no room for more than six. This implies that there are only certain limited configurations of elementary building blocks which then dictate the outcome of complex structures. All the velocities, forces and facets of the universe are interdependent. No other alternative is available as theoretical changes are akin to trying to get 7/13 such items around a core. True atoms are indivisible. You can only have whole numbers of true atoms. They can only be placed in certain ways no matter what. The patterns of beauty that can be created by aligning true atoms together are the only patterns possible.

Any universe that comes into fruition will have the same basic building blocks, there is no other way you can make one. No design is needed and thus no designer either. You may challenge this argument with the idea of bending the planes, potential

distortion of time and space etc. All wrong. I have been presented with a simple gimmick that at first sight is perplexing. Take a strip of paper, put a twist in it and join the two ends. You can walk your finger along and lo and behold you travel through the plane of the paper without 'going through' it. Now draw two lines on the paper, make one a little wiggly to aid identification. When you join the paper one of the lines causes a stupid jump. Only 1 central line joins. Only a single chain of atoms confirms this trick. What plane did you travel through? None.

Carbon can be aligned as black soot, graphite, or diamond. More notably, by rearranging the building blocks of Carbon, eight parts can be transformed into six parts of Oxygen. Identical building blocks form something invisible for us to breath or something remarkable different, in the case of diamond, something very hard and solid.

Trying to define simple standard units such as the metre, ampere, temperature is quite challenging. It is remarkable that each relate to one another so well. It is not some special formula that happens to work nicely but because no other possibility is possible. Rather than being finely balanced it is self-regulating. One aspect holds another back. You can see this in action on an old-fashioned steam engine. It has a spinning regulator. As the engine presses to run faster, the arms of the regulator move outwards closing off the steam pressure and vice versa. When an object continues to have a force applied to it, it keeps accelerating but in ever decreasing amounts. The object obtains a greater mass effect thereby attenuating the rate of acceleration towards zero. It self-limits else it would exceed the relative speed of light. A photon may briefly exceed the average speed that we think of as the constant speed of light. Any time it fractionally exceeds the boundary it is brought back into line quickly by its mass limiter.

The mathematics creates some issues that don't correspond to the way things manifest themselves. If I break a cake in two and say to my friend that they can have the bigger half as I am not that hungry, they know what I mean. We take these ridiculous notions beyond face value. In reality you can't have a half of anything. You were in fact offering 345 zillion cake atoms and leaving 305 zillion for yourself. Fractions are only mathematical concepts and do not translate into tangible items. Circles are x sided shapes, never truly contiguous. The greater the precision of PI, the more dots used in the circle, enlarging it, making it ever more circular. There are only whole numbers, whole quantities of true atoms in practice. Were you to divide 1 by 3 you would have 3 numbers 0.33333..., 0.33333..., 0.33333..., but these don't add up to 1. One third is what is called a transcendental number, where in this case the threes never end. However, for them to add up, one of them

must take on a 4 at some point; 0.33334 Were you to attempt to split an apple in three, one of the pieces would have 1 atom more than the rest.

Maths allows us to imagine a whole lot of nonsense, which have no significance in what can actually be. With idiotic concepts like negative numbers and even dafter imaginary numbers being the square root of a non-existent entity. Great for solving accountancy problems but it has absolutely no place in the real world.

Pathways

What brings about delays and lags we may ask? If you had a very long stick and pushed one end you might expect the other end to move simultaneously. However, this is not the case, as a zero delay is not observed. It would break the relative speed of light. There is a propagational delay. The stick crumples then re-expands all along its length. The delays that we observe are caused by the crumpling which creates a longer pathway. As you push the stick, the force takes a path that is much longer than the stick as it zig-zags through. Gravitational delays occur in the same way. When an object moves, it imparts a change to the gravitational force even on objects that are very far away. The delay in the reaction is brought about by the increased length of the pathway between them compared to the actual relative distance apart. If a fly gets struck by an oncoming train it gets stopped momentarily and therefore the train is also stopped albeit briefly. Except that the fly does not stop, it takes a u-shaped path crumpling and has its trajectory gradually shifted around a semi-circular route.

If god made the earth who made god? What was there before this universe came into existence? Simple questions that children are renowned for asking and are difficult to answer. Items in the universe appear to be moving further apart – in a sense the universe is expanding in size. We could take a wild guess that it started off from a single point. We can come up with many theories and run some equations to see if they are potentially possible. We hit on issues, so we then adapt the theory in hand and retest the numbers. An instantaneous rapid expansion concept is attractive - one of many fashionable ideas. This idea will be replaced by something much more accurate soon enough.

The scope of the space containing the universe is not infinitely large but is a void of null size. The true atoms change their relative distances apart effectively occupying more space in the void. It is not 'what was before this universe' but what state were the true atoms in before they moved to the point they are now. Time remember is an abstract human concept. True atoms materialise and move, at different relative rates. When the conditions are

right, enough in close vicinity they change state once again. Spawned from nought and returned there periodically. The only way is just that.

Evolving Complexity

Some will always see the world as too complex, too beautiful to be here via evolution alone. They will conclude that some force was at work bringing the earth into fruition – an intelligent designer. You could argue that the natural world is too complex for even the most super super being to formulate. So many interdependencies and so many refinements that can only come about through millions of years of gradual adjustments. Life forms would utilise carbon and water in comparable ways, no matter where it spawns. Other planets harbouring life would not be that dissimilar to what we have here.

The electronics revolution provides a comparison to evolution. A humble battery to a complex computer via valves and transistors. With lots of simple switches joined in unison and working in harmony we get a powerful computer. The possibilities increase tremendously with a small increase in the number of switches. If you have an upstairs light and a downstairs one, you have four possible states. Both on. Both off. One off one on. One on one off. With three lightbulbs, you have eight possibilities. As the number of switches increases the permutations go through the roof. To generate graphics and sound, to process information, computers utilise a vast number of basic on/off switches. They accomplish amazing tasks yet are built on basic building blocks. We had to get a single transistor to work reliably first before we could link lots of them together to produce something remarkable. Likewise small organisms had to prosper before they enlarged and linked together to create larger creatures.

If you wanted to build a new computer from different materials, you would not attempt to swap the billions of transistors within the microprocessor all in one go. If you tried this, it would more than likely fail. You would go back to the beginning and build a single transistor out of a different material, get the functionality of that right first. Then gradually string more and more together until a new improved machine is created. This mirrors evolution.

Once the know how has been established it takes hold and spreads rapidly. An organism that operates reliably with a viable successful arrangement propagates quickly and relentlessly. Drop a few algae organisms into a pond and within a few days the whole surface is covered. Progress is only quick once something devised works. Each stage of enhancement takes a long time, testing all the possibilities.

Will to form

Molecules have an inherent propensity to bind, making complex items. They have a will to form structures. If certain chemicals get

into contact with each other, reactions will occur. Bigger and bigger compounds form. The shift from pure chemistry to biology is significant but inevitable. This shift occurs in an environment where the temperature and pressures are just so. If it is not stable for long enough, it all goes in reverse. Think again of snow, at the right temperature with enough moisture the flakes form around a seed. Each wondrously structured snowflake forms automatically. It sure seems incredible that elements and compounds self-assemble into beautiful configurations. It is even more incredible that this will to form brought viruses, bacterium and then bigger creatures into being. The lifecycle, birth to giving birth dictates the rate of evolution of the species. Viruses and bacterium can replicate so much faster than larger animals hence we see faster changes take place. Hours versus years. Life forms reach evolutionary dead ends. They may step back or step sideways a little so long as the new form is still viable.

Accidental progress

Many discoveries were brought about by chance and from unintended results from research. Serendipity. Scientists found some unexpected properties within the things they were toying with. In such cases, they would divert their attention to a new cause. This is akin to the way species progress. The accidentally improved varieties thrive in the environment they inhabit. For every species that is around today a thousand have come and gone. There is far more failure than success.

Viruses change quickly and each one is like a key trying to get through various locks. The ones that open the pathways spread and multiply. The ones that are barred simply fade away. If one out of the thousands of variants happens upon the right combination through luck, they will then go on to multiply further, breaking all the defences in the process. They are not consciously clever. There is no objective or purpose behind evolution. Each mutation changes the species slightly, giving it a different prospect of flourishing. The virus doesn't care about making you ill nor does it try to. It is just a toxin that exists in a more elaborate form than a whole bunch of chemical nasties. Destruction and annoyance are part and parcel of the bigger system and vital to its continuance.

Speak your way to the top

Some question our superiority claiming that dolphins, pigs, and chimpanzees are more intelligent than we give them credit for. Even the humble house cat has an ability to be grumpy when it senses we are packing for another holiday. Chimpanzees will use sex like us to get attention, with their privates glowing bright red, legs wide open, laying partially back between the branches of the tree. Such use of power along with the frequent scolding and

teaching the infants put them on par with us. They understand one another quite well but have not been seen writing about it.

Language can be intentionally ambiguous or stiff and clear. It can be abstract or based on reality. The bigoted assume that only those that can arrange neat prose are able to convey concepts from one mind to another.

There needs to be space for animals to evolve and there is not much of that to foster another equivalent species whilst we hog everything. Would it make a difference to your world view if there were more than one human equivalent around? What if the Neanderthals lived side by side with us the homo sapiens? What if there were three other species with pretty much the same capabilities as each other. Or are they? We might simply assume we are all the same. Only by pure misfortune, a minor string of events led to this lonely species being one that stands out.

Mankind monkied about for ages before we began to distance ourselves as top primate. To make real headway a lot of force, violence and quashing of uncertainty is needed to get the bulk to fall in line with the leaders.

A termite went to see the toppity termite to get approval for a new construction. Yes, you can, go ahead but make sure you create plenty of parking spaces for the disabled and allocate a few levels for the underprivileged. Also, I want to see that it doesn't cast a shadow over the ant's nest over there. The power of being able to talk to one another is not to be underestimated. You can't even think without language. Wrong. Picture an object and rotate it and work out what will fit and where it will reside. Some people can't do this, that is true. There are those with limited or no visualisation capabilities. Can you count without saying 1, 2, 3... in your head? Picture an apple, think of a pair of pillar boxes, a trio of rings and a table with four legs. Now move from one image to another.

Not alone

It is quite likely that on planets some way away, other life forms will evolve or have already evolved too. Communicating with them won't be easy. By the time a message is sent back and forth one or another will be in decline. Will it send the religious into a tailspin? Quite the opposite. Suddenly a long-forgotten scroll will be unearthed and upon it will be a severe message; God has given two sets of people a chance to prove their devotion. The ones who manage to convince every living soul to hold absolute belief and are abiding by certain instructions will be saved. Ideologies are cunning and are adaptable when they need to be.

Perspective

Imagine a world where there are two types of people. Haves and have nots. Whilst there will be degrees of having and not having and no strict border, you can place most roughly in one of the two domains. Akin to class systems, caste, brawn and beauty, hereditary privileges and so forth the domains set people apart. The inferior work for those in the superior domain, cleaning, cooking, delivering, mining, building, fixing etc. The inferior are there at times simply to make up the numbers and create an atmosphere. Used and there to be utilised. The superior get more choice. The superior have a more fulfilling, gratifying time. Their lives are not without problems and issues. Their issues and problems are talked about and are seen as drama. The issues and problems of the inferior are hidden and unnoticed. The brawny and beautiful ones are given more opportunities and more leeway when things they do are less than perfect.

Animal Machine

Many baulk at the idea of being considered as an animal let alone as some fancy self-repairing machine. On the animal front the notion that we are some higher order super species prevails in many quarters. We give birth to live young, eat, defecate, and have a whole host of features in common with other species. So, what separates us? We are not the only ones with self-awareness. Other animals can plan too. We might be judged to have the most intelligence potential, but in other areas we are not as capable. We can't run as quick as a cheetah or swim as well as a dolphin and obviously flapping our arms produces no flight. The combination of deftness, excellent language skills and useful extra intelligence give us a crucial edge. How you view this relatively small margin of superiority is not that important but taking a look at humans from a machine point of view is quite revealing.

There are a lot of ideas out there that propose amazing things, but there is nothing quite the same as having something to test yourself on your self. An examination into how you work takes a little grit yet is nothing more than paying attention to your attention. Firstly, you need to come to terms with the fact that you can only attend to one thing at a time. We can multitask, we can do more than one thing at a time, but we can't pay attention to two things simultaneously. We can switch the attention between a number of things quite quickly but have to dwell for some time on each item, one after the other. I have heard a few say that women are better at multi-tasking than men, well some have been shown to be good at talking and moaning simultaneously but that is the worst example of a difference between the sexes possible. Neither is it true. It appears as though we can manage two things at the same time, but you can only make active adjustments to one thing at a time.

There are numerous tests you can try to watch your attention flick from one thing to another. Walking and talking is a prime candidate. Watch a group of people when out walking and they encounter a gate or have steep steps to climb. The talking will stop briefly whilst they negotiate the obstacle. Anything that is new or unfamiliar will cause an interruption to the flow causing you to stop, work out what to do before proceeding. We can drive and chat, but again we pause speaking when something in the road diverts us. Much of what we do uses autonomy. We examine the procedure then follow it through using the sub-conscious without needing to pay much attention to it.

When we are learning a new skill, such as driving, we focus on all the aspects of handling the vehicle. Once we pass our test and have driven a car for a long time, we can drive with little thought or consideration of how we do so. Sometimes we take the wrong turn as we follow a regular route, one that has been firmly imprinted. We can go from one place to another and not really know how we got there. We paid no attention as we are so familiar with the journey.

Our attention is flipping, moving from one thing to another constantly throughout the day. The attention can dwell for twenty seconds or longer. At other times it is much more fleeting, very brief. The piece of time the attention holds on something is what we call a moment. The attention will get drawn away from the present item by something, an interrupt, maybe a loud noise, a knock on the door, the phone ringing or something moving that catches our eye.

The process of revealing your mechanical workings is a matter of perpetually observing each change of attention. You need to be alert to your every action to become aware of what each event really consists of. All through the day you can probe the countless moments and the physicality of your actions. You need to be fully aware of your attention whilst you are doing things as well as when you are relaxing. It is hard to describe and even harder to get under the skin of it straightway. It is doing something distinct from the notion of deep trances and mediation which might seem like opening a window into the soul. Instead, it is noticing the goings on inside you. Gradually over time you become positively aware of each thing that you are focused on and begin to note everything that distracts you. I found it a little disturbing. It took a few months to 'get in' and unfortunately it took the best part of a year to relinquish the habit and return to a form of normality.

When you blink, your mind shuts off the vision system in time to the blink making it disappear from your consciousness. You don't see black flashes every few seconds as the mind fills in the blanks and creates an illusion of continuity. You will notice the blackouts when you pay attention to your blinking though. Your eyes are constantly scanning all over the place yet the same movement by a video camera would create a horrid fast paced jumping about. This again is not how we experience life. Each change of attention is merged and smoothed over unless you start scrutinising it.

Throughout your day you can spot all the autonomy and all the interruptions that you come across. You will notice the messages from your bladder informing you of the need to go to the toilet. A flight of stairs is briefly judged before you climb them without much need to make adjustments. That is unless you bump into someone coming the other way and need to recalculate a new

path. Then there is the autonomy like your breathing, which can be controlled to a fair extent, but will work away on its own without any active input from your attention. You can ignore many an interrupt like a rumbling stomach more easily if it is below a certain threshold. As the pertinence of the bodily event rises, the messaging system increases the level and frequency of the reminders alerting you to it. An alarm of some sort, be it a loud noise or strange smell can jolt the attention into a mode for reaction. All of which can be monitored precisely by studying oneself.

The attention is the core of the being, the gateway to all areas of the mind and a key part to the sensation of being a conscious individual. As you can only pay attention to one item at a time, various mind modules need to buffer information. Your hearing system records a few seconds worth of sound. It will operate in an endless loop over writing the moments prior. If you feel the need to examine the sounds, you can pay attention to this area and copy the stream for further examination before you lose it. Sometimes we can't make out what someone has just said initially, then after some processing you make it out. We work out what they said, but it can be error prone.

This mind buffer which stores a stream of sound has a time limit. It can be potentially circa one to two seconds in length. Thus, if a phone number is spoken to you quickly you will capture more digits than if they are spoken slowly. The buffer fills up. Extracting a person's voice from all the background noise with other people talking is no mean feat. Some struggle with this when certain parts of the human machine begin to decline. When in peak condition it can decipher fragmented speech and calculate the most probable bits to string it all together into something coherent. Inventing something to place in the gaps is a native prominent feature of the mind and we get confused by what is invented to fit and what wasn't.

Our minds have a lot to contend with, just to maintain the health of the body. Regulating the metabolism and monitoring many things from the heart to the lungs and other organs, plus it is always alert for pain signals. There is a lot going on around the clock most of which we don't pay attention to and can't do much about. There is a lot we can do without being able to describe how we do it. We just learn how to do it with our conscious mind and then file it away in our sub-conscious. We can then do it automatically without having to pay any regard to it.

Each mind function runs autonomously at different levels according to need. The process by which the attention flits between them without jarring creates the illusion of consciousness. It is the amalgamation of all the sensory inputs

and thought centres, each having their turn acting on the core attention that brings about the feeling of being alive. As there is a seamless transition from one to another and never locking onto one for any great length of time, we get this sense of cognition that we all take as experiencing normal life.

We can set a function a task to do and when it is complete it will let us know by way of bringing it to our attention. We may be working on a problem, cast it to the back of our mind for it then to reappear solved sometime later. Each area can only do one task at a time competently giving rise to conflicts. Doing something with your hands won't detract from working on a solution to a mental problem. However, trying to write and speak at the same time is not feasible as the same language area is being utilised. Trying to look at two things at the same time is equally challenging. Whilst the eye will notice movements using a different schema to the visual processing area, all it can do is bring it to your attention. Quite often it will be set to look out for certain things. Where once tyre repair shops do not stand out, you begin to see them everywhere when you have recently been on the lookout for them because of a puncture.

Place a treat in someone's bedroom. Put it somewhere it can be seen but not too obvious. Sometimes it can be days rather than hours before they notice it. People can be asked to count the number of times a juggler transfers some balls between their hands. In the background a big gorilla moves past and few notice it as they are paying attention to the moving balls. Magic tricksters understand this and will control the focus of their targets using sleight of hand. They distract and draw your attention away from what they are hiding from you.

As your vision is far removed from a camera and works by building up a picture, your mind makes up what could potentially fill the gaps. Every time you walk into a room you do not process each and every object as that would take a very long time. Instead, you scan around and just identify the important things. What we see and remember is far removed from what we actually receive through our eyes.

People leave a restaurant and have a great recollection of people they know, people that they are attracted towards and not a clue about anyone else that was there. We clock what we like the look of. Hence why old people literally grey out as the scan skips them completely. Camouflage works so well because to survey an entire scene in front of an animal takes too many mental resources. When you know what to look for and have an idea of the shape it becomes much easier. As a large region of the mind is devoted to the complex task of facial recognition it is hardly

surprising that we can see faces in tree bark and clouds as it is always on the go trying to identify them.

Your mind skips a lot, ignores a lot, cuts corners, approximates things and allow much to pass it by. The errors we make stem from us storing things in a fuzzy emotive way, rather than as concrete digital data. Having an impression of something is a quick method of absorption. This is one area where we differ from mechanical devices. People believe they are right, convinced at times beyond any uncertainty, but in truth they are liable to make significant and frequent mistakes because our capacity to process information at speed is somewhat limited.

You can get under the skin of the attention movements caused by pain and sensory alarms. An unusual touch like an itch or bite or a sound above ambient levels and unexpected tastes will be easier to follow than reminder signals though. We set up inbuilt reminder calls for something we had planned to do. These are not quite so straightforward to work into the self-examination process. You can jostle with the itinerary nudge, but you will find the mechanics much harder to relate to compared with other interruptions. Each of us has different pain thresholds with some being able to tolerate a lot more than others. Some aspects of pain can be enjoyable to some. Pain is change after all. Change feeds the reward system. Some things we find are uncomfortable, but others take great pleasure in it. The rest are indifferent towards it. You may even get to appreciate what someone feels when they get pain from a phantom limb, a limb that they no longer have.

The heart has neurons very similar to those in your head. The heart gets a request to beat harder and faster rather than being controlled directly from above. I suppose saying someone has a good heart is appropriate as it is a separate entity to the spirit in the mind. When something does indeed drop on your foot, stop, and examine what is happening. You may notice that the pain is in the foot not your mind, the throbbing is very much there with the cells telling you about it. You are a collection of parts not a complete object which also hosts a few kilograms of bacteria with their own cooperative agenda. It is not only you that gets hungry. Life maybe a series of problems but it is also a sequence of interrupts.

The chance of anyone getting this far in this book is remote. Even less will bother to do any real self-examination, so an extensive explanation of the animal machine is quite a waste. However, if you are in the tiniest of tiny minority that wants something to while away a few weeks of your time keep focusing on your attention. Every action, pumping, inhaling, swallowing. It is all mechanical. It is distinctly different from relaxing, meditating or

trying to blank the mind. It is following every single switch of action, being alert to all changes and constantly consciously observing all the things that divert you from the moment in hand. Nothing will seem the same if you persist with it. It is a different process from any mind aware quiet time, beyond thinking about thinking. It is intercepting every aspect of the human machine. The fantasy element during sex is curtailed and replaced by a bodily awareness, the input to the senses replaces the sensuality. If you begin to watch your blinking, you will notice the black flash but a few minutes later you forget that you forgot you are not noticing it. That's no good. Apply this to the many other things going on and you are on your way. If that is too troublesome, try watching a game of football and keep watching the referee. Ignore the ball and the players. Just watch the referee for a while. Lie on your back. Close your eye. Plug your ears. Get someone to touch you at random, titillate or sensually sooth.

Special keys

Our life, being a series of moments - a few milliseconds to many seconds long, can get disrupted. Load up with one key and it enables you to lock onto a thought path for much longer. This key will reduce the amount the attention twitches. Along with the relaxing effect it can enable you to solve problems that require a lot of thought. The effect can bring about laughter at rather ordinary events, though this diminishes over time as you get accustomed to the way it works on your mind. It is one of the many keys that provide that all important change, change that gives reward and satisfaction.

With the ability to visualize and imagine things, pictures can be brought to the fore with eyes closed or open. Sounds can be replayed. Some keys can interfere with the usual way we manage these inner workings. Some will see this as spiritual enlightenment rather than the reality of a machine behaving in a way that we are not accustomed to. Those vibrant flashing effects, distorted, beautiful they may be, are normally reserved for those with things like synaesthesia. When a key unleashes spurious signals, amplifying ones that would normally be ignored and unnoticed the mind stumbles to keep up. Dormant memories can be brought to the fore with messages tripping over one another. They can hijack many pathways including those from the inner ear which causes rapid head spin and juddering. Can you use a key and hold your nerve? The attention will be threshed and scattered and difficult to manage. Use of keys need not be restricted to those that want a distraction from the humdrum of existence. It may help you appreciate your irrelevance and get further under the skin of being a machine. Just pray that the key does not jam in the lock.

Nothing Matters

Whilst you are sitting there comfortably a student is feeling something sharp on her neck. A small knife terminating all those plans of going to university. Due to incompetence, due to a desire to be fair to everyone and not placing the risk to innocents at the top of the agenda, a person with mental health problems is on the loose. They have attacked and killed this fragile irreplaceable young beauty. In their prime. A future partner not to be. What she would have done in her life, what she may or may not have achieved, no one will ever know. Only we and those that knew her can imagine. We hear stories like these and wonder what the heck is it all about. Some feel that it won't happen to them so not a great concern. Look at the statistics, these kinds of things are rare. There is evil in our midst, but overall, most people are kind and considerate. The majority passionately care for others. The good outweighs the bad by far, despite the spiteful vein inside us all that lashes out occasionally. Retaliation is rewarding. As is peace making and reconciliation. And of course love can conquer all.

Day and night people are active, making love, making plans, going to bed, or getting up. Each of us reside in our own little world expressing enthusiasm, doubts, and beliefs. There are plenty of inspiring people out there. We can be pleased to be alive to witness amazing events. Would you have chosen this period in man's history to be born? Was it better before or will it be better in years to come? One thing is for sure, it takes a lot of effort to get to where we want to be. Sometimes it is five hours work for a few minutes of joy. We have to battle against those that wish to thwart us, those that believe that they are right and you are wrong. Fun can peak and we may yearn for new challenges. Round and round it goes all looking good until the sun comes up again, shedding light on the cracks ignored the night before. This circular rhythm of life is a thing of majesty, but on occasions we feel different in the cold light of day.

The cycle

I spent years refurbishing electronic goods, giving them a new lease of life. I earned a great deal of money from it. Although this job provided me a living, where are all those items now? I imagine most are in landfill. Some may still be in use and maybe one remains gathering dust in a museum. A few will have been reused in part and a percentage will have been recycled and put into new products. At the time, all the work we do seems so important. With perfectionists willing us to make sure the items we sell are the best they can be. We fuss over all the details and it makes us

proud that we did a good job. When we look back at all the heartache making sure everything is ready in time and presented as nicely as possible, you think that although people got some use out of them, they were soon dispensed with. So long as people made money and got by that is all that needs to be said.

The packaging however elegant makes it to the bin first followed shortly afterwards by the item itself. At each stage people get a sense of the significance of what they are doing. The factory worker will be doing their utmost to get the most done, the most assembled in the working day. It can be a repetitive job doing the same thing over and over for a meagre existence on the pay given. They will have people working upstairs devising new ways to do the job faster with more mechanisation to get greater numbers made at a lower cost. There will be people digging out all the raw materials risking life and limb shrugging off the impact on their health to feed those factories. There will be marketeers and advertising people working late into the night ensuring the campaign fulfils the remit. Then all the delivery people on ships and in lorries transporting the items, making sure deadlines are met. They are all content to get paid for their undertaking, equally proud of the service they give. Finally, it gets to the shops. The people there create the displays and start feeling the pressure of hitting sales targets to ensure the overheads are covered. It is left to the shoppers to decide what to buy and take home and determine how much use it will get before it is thrown out.

When we make something, we have this hope that someone will appreciate the effort gone into making it. We envisage people wearing the cloth we stitched together or enjoying the product we designed and put into production. We focus on the upside and keep our focus away from how often items get damaged, destroyed on purpose, or just left in a cupboard unloved. Once it is yours you can do what you like with it and disregard the feelings of those that made it. In the process of taking something from mine to landfill we don't pay much attention to the many meetings people have had in determining the path of their products. So much discussion about what needs to be done. They will have drawn up road maps, laying out routes the company should take and worked on strategies to embark upon. Talk to any retailer and they will brighten up your day with tales about the sharp end of what being in business entails. Dealing with the taxes, hassle from customers and countless other troubles they contend with. Nevertheless, we work through the issues and place a high importance on our involvement.

Some items are used more than once unlike the produce a farmer brings to market. After all the toiling in the field to get the grain to send to the miller and then on to the baker, we eat the bread.

It gets consumed then dumped. The cycle of life providing us with the sustenance to go to work, to shuffle some more documents. Your magazine that was edited, spellchecked, and proofed gets torn up and put at the bottom of the animal cage. You work hard to develop your skills and become a computer programmer, someone who rearranges rust on a disc. However, it is no different. Your project gets released, used then deleted or updated and forgotten about. So, you decide to get a hands on outdoor job landscape gardening. You shift all the mud around in people's gardens making rockeries and ponds. Then if you are smart you leave a business card around so that someone at a later time will ask you to return. You then make some more money levelling it back over again to make it easier for old people using walking frames to get about.

I went over to see one of my tenants and whilst there they wanted me to marvel at all their redecorating. They said in jest that the house was worth more now that all this work has been done. Sadly, although it may look nice to them now, it will all be painted over back to plain white when they leave. Buildings are never immune from this endless changing and tinkering. Many get put up nice and neatly then knocked down to make way for a road or a new development. If it is not deterioration, then a building has to avoid fire, floods and earthquakes and unless it has some preservation order placed on it, it is unlikely to be left alone. Whatever happens, it will need a lot of maintenance year after year. And that is what it is about - doing what is needed to keep on top of things. Leave your garden for a short while and it soon becomes an overgrown jungle. You can plot and plan a garden placing plants here and there but someone else arrives, this new custodian has other ideas and will rip them all out. Still, a little refresh whether inside or outside our home, gives us an uplift which lasts for a good few days. Furniture gets replaced whether it has worn out or not and we do smile if it turns out to be more comfortable than the last lot we ejected. All the upgrading brings us up to a new norm, raising our expectations. Improvements can relieve us from arduous tasks.

It can be all about the temperature. Some like it warm some like it cold and things breed and spread according to the temperature. However, nothing you make or do is immune from a degree of heat, it can all be melted down. All the arrangements and construction that we spend a lifetime working on can be unravelled in an instant. Yet each person in the chain feels what they are doing has some significance.

Maintenance

It is not all downbeat, but people wonder where they are heading when faced with this constant battle of maintenance, keeping

things going, making sure things are fed and watered, bills paid and up to date, friendships affirmed, and toe nails clipped. There are forms of progress made without doubt in some areas and of course the houses provide places for people to live, food gives nourishment, and the games provide entertainment. We also learn through the advancement of drugs and technology even if it is just new techniques and methods of doing things quicker and more cheaply. However, the bulk of the population go into work and do their bit then return home, arrange something to eat and retire to bed after a few short hours on the couch and begin to wonder what it is for. All those people you shifted in a taxi will make their way back again. Even the blood sweat and tears that are spent developing new medicines seems disheartening if their effectiveness wanes over time. When someone thinks in terms of productivity and improvement and push for progress, others realise that what people are doing really is nothing more than tweaking, modifying and changing things around most of the time. Hence this book started from the very thought of why we bother. It too will be read by a tiny number of people and lost in the mass of all the better works.

We can revel in a long lie in, staying in bed into the later part of an afternoon or idle away a day or two but most tire of this when days of doing little extends to weeks and months. We certainly feel better once the house has been vacuumed and the rubbish put out and as much as we can do today has been done. Being thankful that we have another day where we can still do things for ourselves is enough for many but there are times when we look for more. Some things we create, and mould may linger but the bulk of it will be refreshed, changed, and updated. The vultures circle at your death picking the prized items to sell, a little is hoarded for a while whilst the remainder is discarded. Only the arguments about who is to pay for the hearse and next world arrangements persist, albeit briefly until the acrimony fades. Nothing much is forever. Not really. Only in our blinkered aspiration. Maybe some pearls of wisdom get handed down, utilised or rebelliously ignored and acted upon in a polar opposite way.

Mankind has achieved a lot, much of it visible like the impressive buildings and transport systems. Other accomplishments are hidden underground; pipes enabling us to flush our waste and cables by which we power things and communicate. All of this and so much more gives us a real sense of being the top dog in the animal kingdom. It also leads us to think that there is a grand plan of some sort.

With lots of people working together, mountains of rock and earth can be moved to build dams diverting colossal amounts of

water. We have our thoughts diverted too. Away from our insignificance in the grand scale of the universe towards what we can see around us. It is all too easy to forget that we are on a tiny planet floating in a wide wide sea of space. With ever greater light pollution we stop bothering to look up as much now anyway. Another thing out of sight out of mind.

Whilst we have the tools to achieve earthly ends, we have some serious limitations. Getting to the moon took enormous effort and staying there for any length of time has proved somewhat difficult. The prospect of colonising other planets is highly unlikely. We would not survive any lengthy trip in our current form. Our bodies are suited to this cosy place and would fall apart elsewhere. Even if we were to harness new energy sources in time to aid the journey, we are unlikely to do much before the conditions on this planet deteriorate. Mankind is strong and dominant in its domain but futile outside of it.

We live in a relatively thin atmosphere and can't go too far above nor below the surface without encountering problems. Where many go on pilgrimages to distant lands to fulfil obligations, one needs to go somewhere above 14000 ft. to get the experience of how hard it is to walk about and do things there that are ordinary at sea level. If you intend to acclimatise on the way up, go higher to get the same effect. Get a feel of your feebleness.

Some people have the power to upend the lives of millions and change a lot, but they have no control over the destiny of the universe. As a species, we can play no significant part in the running of the universe for we are microbes, truly miniscule on the scale of what is out there. This can invite us to look introspectively on the petty squabbles and desires of day-to-day living. Some may speculate that as technology progresses, we will be capable in the future to do something about a large object hurtling towards the earth. It is hope over reason to assume that a film star will set off with a large explosive and alter its trajectory. More than likely, we wouldn't even spot it until it is too late anyway. There are countless doomsday scenarios that are not worth worrying too much about so instead we are more inclined to keep our patch tidy and sort small troubles out.

The earth shields us from the harsh external environment with a magnetic core and a specific atmosphere, for how long it will remain that way we can't be certain. For most people, so long as they are going to be okay and their children will be alright it is not something we feel the need to pay too much attention to.

What happens on the earth is irrelevant to the wider universe. Whether we thrive or not won't make any significant difference, the earth will continue its orbit around the sun however damaged or pristine. The rest of the planets, stars, comets and all the

cosmic dust will also follow some course as they have done for some time. If the earth broke up it wouldn't really matter but of course it would be a pity for us living here. All that knowledge, all those talents would be lost and gone forever. If it makes you happy you could archive all of humankind's discoveries and scientific postulations. Store them in multiple vaults and as a further backup fire them off in bright yellow capsules in multiple directions to different galaxies. For surely all this work can't be in vain. Maybe we could pass from this life into a virtual electronic form and float in an ocean of marvelousness. Great idea, but reward is felt through the chemical changes within a body not a change in bit state.

Have you served a higher purpose, and have you done enough to qualify? There is nothing but admiration for those who do not fake their belief and have real faith in their god. They understand that the godly force is around us, watching from the side lines waiting to pull aside only the really committed ones. So long as you have picked the correct spiritual entity from the mass of conflicting ones available. Was it reasonable to make the younger ones in your charge follow your lead. Are you comfortable with them feeling guilty if they are not as committed as you? Were they given the chance to check out alternatives?

Some believe that if we all were to obey the orders from up above or form a harmonious bond with one another, all things will come together to form an unbeatable sphere of rectitude. If only the arguments would peter out. Problems make us as much as they break us. If we whittled all the languages down to one and stuck to a solitary belief system, the job will be done. And that will be the point where it is game over for all.

Either way

What you do with your life doesn't matter, what you don't do doesn't matter, nothing really matters. Whatever the outcome you will die at some point regardless. People around us make it feel as though things matter. We care about our lives and care about the things we do and have compassion for others. Things mentioned at the start of this text drive us to care. We are all co-considerationally selfish, we are ridden with curiosity and placated with a reward system. Enlightened, educated, informed or sophisticated, call it aware, we may or may not be. We have our time, we play our game and it only seems to make a difference but ultimately it does not.

The reason we care so much about what people think, what we have achieved and what we can now do following study and hard work is this. We might not leave a legacy, we might not make any notable changes to the planet, but what we are makes a huge difference to the how things will be in the years we have left. Our

personal progress counts for what we can do next before we die.
After that it is matters not one bit.

The journey

We are spat out at the source of the river. Some manage three heartbeats and become another still born statistic. Others drown or hit the rocks. Those that make it to adulthood are still being swept along by the force of the current. All of us end up in the ocean to meet our maker and reused by those in the lower ranks of the food chain. All the atoms that have been holding us together are then given over for other animals and the plants to use.

Looking at life deeply is akin to swimming to great depths. Some will choose to stay on the surface. Some will explore a little way down and a good few will reach the bottom gaining awareness by touching the river bed. Those swimming down get to see a whole world of intrigue. The metaphorical coral reefs, the unending variety of fish and sea species. On the surface, it is just a limited world view. No matter how far you get or how deep you explore you have to return to the surface to eat and breathe though. An enthralling life still terminates at the graveyard irrespective of how deep you swim. We can't truly escape our human form. No new technology or future advances in science will change that. Emotion needs a whole living body. We will never be able to morph into something that lives forever.

We as members of the human race participate to varying degrees. Many people have come and gone and lots more should follow. You can only come back as another member not as a particular individual. Memory of a former life is not evident or up for serious discussion. Though you will have made some waves, some interference, connection, and disturbance to the soul of all life for sure. A simple act of going into a shop and buying something is enough to make a difference to some else's day, more cash in the till and more stock that needs replenishing. On the brighter side your smile and friendly greeting can boost the morale of the serf counting down the minutes left before going home.

The journey inside yourself, the examination of what and who you are can change your priorities. Many of us will go on holiday and whilst there we get more of a chance to sit and think. We reflect for a while but return to reality quite quickly once back at home and back at work. There is always that important meeting to attend and project to finish, never relenting never ending. What are we working for if we don't balance the financial rewards with inner rewards of a quality of life? The things that seem to be so pertinent and cherished at some point in time end up as waste to contend with. Consumerism, items made and fanned out across the globe percolating down the line to satisfy a fleeting need. You

will have a role in some of that. It may have provided something for people to remark upon, enjoyment even, but was the value exaggerated?

If one thing disheartens me more than anything it is the naff comments and retreating demeanour when a conversation gets more involved. In discussions that are a little deeper, people come alive, their body language tells it all. I never ever found it in the least bit depressing. I found it to be the exact opposite. I can appreciate that people have entrenched views and beliefs yet when pushed they can argue their case rather well. Throwaway lines such as “we are putting the world to rights tonight” have the subtext; Nothing we say will make any difference and that we should keep our heads down and remain busy with the business of everyday life. Many people won’t need to read a book or study a script to find themselves never being embarrassed, having great confidence and a free nature. Having any form of enlightenment is not a necessity nor is it a worthy aim, but some can see a positive in being more of what they want to be. There is a liberating practical side to philosophy.

Some are born *laissez-faire* and worry little about anything, but when the onset of financial pressures takes its toll or the prospect of taking possession of a house beckons, or a baby comes onto the scene things can change somewhat. People come to the realisation that problems, serious or otherwise can be put to the back of their head until directly faced with them. Then they can be broken down into manageable parts and worked through. It is not about ignoring a car crash that is soon to happen nor procrastinating and sidestepping things that would be good to get resolved. Instead, it is taking the attitude that you will just deal with any problems as and when they arise. Work out the options, select one and get it done. Muddling through is a norm and is alright considering that the last thing people want is to be judged. One does not need to justify their ways for humble individuals can see the greyness where a preacher has distilled things into a black and white, acceptable unacceptable dryness.

Many wish to make the world a better place but at the same time yearn for the simplicity of the past. Progress is not always viewed as positive; we make changes for what we see as good, ignoring the possibility that such alterations have downsides and compromises. We only end up with a few more options a few more choices and slightly quicker alternatives. Some like the changes and others see the alterations as spoiling what was perfectly fine before. Is sex any better now than it was 1000 years ago? Maybe the opportunity to take part has been prolonged into older age with magic pills to maintain the stiffness and sensuality. It could be that plastic aids have replaced wooden or leather ones

but are these really worthy of industrial and technology revolutions, and human sacrifices. The next time you walk into a meadow or trot down a valley ask yourself if nature's beauty has been helped or hindered by all our endeavours. You plant this and that and cut back a vivacious species hoping to enforce a balance by killing all the things that were doing just fine.

Things are progressing. We have moved on. However, the excitement for what is around the corner, advancements to come, wanes when you realise that what really matters is pretty constant. Has fashion improved? Not one bit. You may cringe at what you wore 20 years ago, but it was as good as what it is today.

In the past good quality housing, access to information, clean running water and the means to travel were an aspiration. Now they have moved more towards been taken for granted. With ever better medicinal practitioners we also live longer in some nations than before. However, we must not ignore the truth that half of the world live on the equivalent to what the other half might spend on single cup of coffee a day. I doubt compassion and relief for the less well-off will increase to noticeable levels anytime soon. We care if the wealthy perish in a small event but if tens of thousands get washed away or shaken to pieces in an impoverished place it is a case of *c'est la vie*. Life goes on regardless, often oblivious and there is a limit to what we can do or are prepared to sacrifice.

We like to think that we make steps forward in the political arenas and that we have more freedoms now than before. However, the governments simply get better at creating an illusion of this and harden their stance. More and more disruptive technologies are changing the way we do business. This has sparked new ventures not possible previously. From making fire to cook, to using fire to generate steam, disruption is nothing new. They are all however progressing at the expense of something else, not always adding to the sum of all things. We have to do more, learn more and consider more just to tread water. Where some risks have been eliminated others have emerged. For a good few, life today has the potential to be more rewarding, for others little has changed. The subjects we talk about change, but the joy of talking to one another is always the same. Of course, there have been outstanding improvements, but some things get lost in this process of change. I am particularly impressed with a purchase of mine, namely an ultrasonic tooth cleaner. The genius of this was not available in the recent past let alone centuries ago.

Preoccupation

The overwhelming majority of people become so preoccupied with their day-to-day existence that they never stop to consider what it is all about. It helps if you aren't in a stressful difficult

situation maybe with money concerns or having to care for people in poor health. Then we have the myriad of distractions where we can't even use the loo without something to read or play with. This is not a major issue as the ignorance paradox takes in people that explore, people that ignore, people that shy away from difficult subjects, all people, and the only difference between one that thinks they know more is a bit of smugness. In other words, it makes not one jot of difference how much you know at the final reckoning. People living in so-called ignorance can be as happy as anyone else and be as fulfilled as the next man. Where do you draw the line, how much knowledge is enough? Ignorance of the facts, ignorance due to lack of understanding and ignorance less to do with stupidity but not even knowing what you don't know. Many live a whole life in hardship never discovering the riches close to hand.

We all know we can't take our wealth with us, but some might be glad to leave any debts behind. Many build a tomb and have their treasure buried with them spiting those that could have made use of it. When you die, your skills, knowledge and years of learning evaporate. All that mastery and structure of your soul is no more. That is the real loss.

Did you make a contribution? Was it one that nobody else could have managed. Was it one nobody would have made at some later point. Will the world stop when you do, or will it carry on quite fine without you? Will you be missed? Maybe briefly and you come to the fore in a few people's mind from time to time until they pass away too. Empires that you build crumble either quite quickly after you die or at some stage later on. The changes you made get changed again and all traces of you gets gradually wiped away to leave not much more than a name in a register or footnote in history.

It is not uncommon for some to initially proclaim that they are going to change the world. Then lower their sights on making a big difference to their country. As time passes this gets reduced to a more realistic aim of making a small mark on their immediate locality. From aspiring to rid the world of all diseases to getting a hole on the village hall roof fixed.

One high achievement in its own right is to get through to the end unscathed. To avoid being stabbed, shot, injured, or debilitated by the plethora of dangers. To be left unscarred by the losses of loved ones especially those that you were helpless to help is a big thing. It only takes one tiny body part, a gland, valve, a seemingly insignificant bit of your anatomy to go awry changing an outlook from heavenly to hellish in an instant.

The optimism of finding a definitive explanation for matters of life and living fade over one's lifetime. So much ends with a

conclusion that wasn't quite what was hoped for. You begin to see that there are at least two sides to everything, and we have to work out which to use in each scenario. Each judgement has to be made in context and nothing is quite as simple as we first thought. The early bird catches the worm, hence a worm does well to have a lie in. Writing this heap of words is like a policeman hunting a suspect for years on end, to finally find out that the culprit has died long ago. Never getting the chance to apprehend nor comprehend the waste of effort. All the policeman really set out to do was change a few neurons in their head. Case open to case closed.

Not only are these words futile in what they aimed to point out, but when it came to use them as a guiding force they failed miserably. Luck can play a bigger part than knowledge. I concede that knowing what ought to be the best way to play the game didn't always help. Knowing how and being able is quite different. It takes skill to apply knowledge. It takes practice to apply knowledge skilfully. You don't always get enough tries at it. Sometimes we can dream, but a dream is all it will ever be.

There is a vain hope that when it ends you will be given the answers. All will be revealed. If only that were so. Those whose mind has deteriorated by disease will surely have their memories fully restored so they too will get their vindication. You will be proven correct and only small details of where you erred will be filled in. The only blunder is having this belief and as the whiteness turns to dark you will not even be conscious of your own expiration. Another precious life completed. The world is no more as far as you are concerned. You die every night in effect and there will be no exciting beautiful fun unreal real dreams as an interlude. If you perish in a big calamity, blown up, smashed to pulp in an instant you won't even get the last wonderful ride, the hallucinogenic peace making dreamy last few minutes of ultimate bliss.

Whilst some readers will be in fine fettle and have the strength to partake in many exciting fun things, there comes a day when you realise that you won't do x ever again. No rampant sex, no riding a motorcycle, no whatever, not even steady on your feet anymore. No more climbing up ladders. This brings me to peak you. When was that? Peak beauty is in the eye of the beholder but when did the eyeing up as you passed someone in the street start and when did it tail off? When were you in peak athletic shape? When were you at your most knowledgeable? Lots of facts and figures are there to be accumulated to get to peak knowledge. Slowly but surely various memories drain away. You get to the point where you can't even get the right word out for something commonplace. Death occurs in pieces. Bits of you die.

Sometime new green shoots appear though giving you hope and false confidence. When are you at your most skilful? You can retain your sharpness in some skills to the day you flop. It all depends on the skill and how much the increase in frailty hampers things. You are what you eat, you are how you behave, you are what you remember and can do. It is difficult to pinpoint when the zenith of your life is, the pint when you are fully you. Fuzzy is the word to describe periods where you are most complete. Don't dismiss this. You were a sperm and an egg, a baby, a toddler, a child and so on. You were never the same. Not ever. You are a body in transit and transition. Maybe your name remains the only constant.

You might even start to think that at least today is another day closer to the day you will no longer worry about anything anymore whatsoever. Some may goad you to plant a garden or learn how to make fancy bread. I wanted to give something back to the earth upon which I came and bought lots of segments of land which I left alone. Nature has managed just fine for hundreds of thousands of years so I felt that these lands can prosper without any intervention. In a small but not inconsequential way it deducts from the overall sufferance and displacement effect of our individual existence. An animal gives birth, gives milk and nurturing to their offspring. You then steal all that effort to gratify yourself in each meal you eat. You can't avoid having to take, to rob, to steal to live. Don't pretend that paying money for an item of food exempts you from calling it theft. Someone, some animal, some collection of insects were denied that item of food. Your dwelling occupies land that another cannot now subsume. The ecosystem as a whole will not pity your demise, they will be thankful for it. There will be more to go around.

Those true atoms that built structure using simple inherent rules derived from simple whole numbers created this dog-eat-dog universe. Bacteria eat flesh and fauna, birds swallow insects whole and humans rise at dawn to be spiteful and generally unkind. Sometimes, on a few rare occasions they are nice. Nice without being paid for their niceness. Nice in the co-considerational way, helping and willing others to succeed rather than hoping they fail. If you make a friend by cutting through your prior prejudice, sit together and soon after the sun sets you will spot the first star, then the next, then quite a few each sending a beacon of existentialism.

People may stare at the stars and wonder at our insignificance, whereas others will have no such interest. They may deem subjects like astronomy as really dull and irrelevant. The whys and wherefores of existence have no relevance to what they are doing. You may wish to explore avenues of thought, but others

won't, they 'have' to get up in the morning and go to work. They have more pressing things on their mind that 'must' get done. The trap, the illusion, the compulsion to conform, the urge to fit in, the need, the greed, the want for more, the guilt, the toil, the fun, the pleasure. We will be doing it for ever and ever until the day we realise 'our time is now' is no longer.

Many people are looking for the meaning of life without realising that there is none. Some will treasure the connections with one another, friendships, kinships, relationships, and shared experiences and see that as the most immutable important currency. If you were hoping for a happy ending or some guidance as to what to do, here you will be disappointed. The ignorance paradox doesn't tell you what you should do, there is no lesson to be learnt it is just a feature of life. And if you should be confused or fail to get the riddle just reread the beginning and once a few pages in again, you will see it no doubt. Any downheartedness turns to an uplifting sense of freedom. Maybe, but then why bother, we already have our own personal worthy aims.

Great but not impressed say you. It is a correct observation to see anyone challenging you as a type that is just pretentious. Nothing more than crystallising stuff we already half know. Some will blithely say "I could have thought of that". Except you didn't and wouldn't unless it was fired at you. What has been laid out here might seem obvious now, but you haven't the courage to admit that it was not at all obvious before.

Your problem is that you have not got a problem, that is what it seems. Neither a stumbling block nor self-doubt. You have day-to-day issues and mountains of things to contend with, problems of sorts, but your life is running swimmingly. You retain the idea of heading towards a day where you have even greater self-esteem. To be even more revered. In fact, you think of yourself as the wise one, the one people come to for help and a leg up. Scores to settle, points to prove with your peers, people nearly as rich or with more wealth, people with more influence or greater notoriety. The great guru the one who saw through the mess and picked wisely. The top chump who looks at the zookeeper with disdain. Everything will be done at a time of my choosing, everything is in control. I will work out what, when and to whom I will give my assets away. My life is sorted. The sleepwalker. Mr zookeeper knows they themselves are not superior. They aren't looking down their nose at others. They are not laughing at them. They are not trying to change people, but they do like to instil some self-doubt in those around them.

Maybe it is me that has all these daft conjectures and everyone else is going along just fine. Nope, there are funerals every day,

people retiring, people changing direction after pursuing schemes for ages. Let's not rock the boat and stop challenging people.

We see those that are sleepwalking, those that dabble a bit, plenty that plan their life, many self-assured, the completely uninterested and all those that are a mix of all these. Some will find meaning in life through what they are doing, but some are adamant that there is no ultimate meaning whatsoever. The thing that bothered me the most was how to justify saying that there is no meaning to life. How to put it into perspective?

We have those that are totally sure they are doing what they should be and will be making sure everyone else is following too. They are the ones lots of people look up to for reassurance that they are on the right path. The similarity to these groups of people and an ant colony is remarkable. There will be soldier ants on hand to guard against invaders, but also to keep the worker ants in check. Any ant that deviates from doing as they are told is quashed. Some will be inspired by the group effort seeing it for the good of all, however, it is in principle for the benefit of the king master ant the most.

The dabblers explore quite a lot. They feel semi-satisfied that on aggregate they have lived a virtuous life and need not worry about political or social problems that are too complex and too numerous. Plus, there is no point fussing day and night over things that are out of their control anyway. They meddle with a few bits and pieces to 'expand their horizons'. With a little bit of charity work and some community involvement they are quite content.

The planners find an objective and do what is necessary to achieve it. They will have their long-term goals and set themselves a few side tasks. Getting to where they want to be is what it is all about for them. A university qualification, job upgrade, better house, faster car to developing an item or system that will transform life as we know it. It is all part of the distraction technique of being busy enough to feel it is unnecessary to consider deep meanings. Those that are the most occupied are the least interested in the underlying why.

Maybe we could live more in the moment. Yet why shy away from being nostalgic from time to time? It is enjoyable looking forward to things in the future as well. We can have balance, an equitable portion of all three, for all are good.

It is all about degrees, degrees of merit. Take a look at a dog, it can be fairly content with its lot. They don't have the pressure of dog school and all the exams at the end of it, although some do get house trained and learn a few tricks. Any dog that goes on regular walks, has a balanced diet, and receives love and

attention is seen as getting a fulfilling life. Lower down the scale we could point to a mouse. It will have a great time running up and down the pipes in your home and live a while before running out of steam. Does it have meaning in its short life with its heart beating many times quicker than yours.

Standing beside a stream I watched an insect swoop down to get a drink and got caught up in the flow. As it meandered down heading towards a stick, I was expecting it to grab onto it, get out and dry off before flying away. It was swirled about by the eddies and arrived near the bit of wood then, floosh, gobbled and gone by a crafty fish in wait for passing fodder. What meaning did that insect have in its life? Pare down to the bacteria and you get living things with ever shorter life cycles. We as humans propose that because we are much more advanced that there must be more to life than being born, fidgeting about a bit, then succumbing to some illness or dying in an accident. Having a greater thinking capacity gives us the illusion and delusion of being more than the dog, mouse, bacterium, and lump of wood.

I look at some people and wonder what makes them tick. I know the drives now, but to see an old codger, senile, plodding at a snail's pace on a mission to fetch a simple loaf of bread with day after day of aimless aims, what am I not seeing? Their close cousin is the retard, the slow in mind, fast in unusual body movements with a gurning grin, docile manner and fruitlessness than makes us look the other way. Painted nails and plastic fantastic, fake, fudged, and self-consumed is thee that lays upon a cheap bed in the sun. Catering for this lovely one is the eternal slave sauntering along to open up, get things ready once again, knowing it is futile to even imagine anything more. The prim and proper, all tidy and discreet getting made up for another big event. To others it is an excuse to have a drink and be merry, for these it is a chance to demonstrate their class. A class act in a class of impressers. Who is here, who has been de-ranked and who has been up to no good in the eyes of those that make the rules?

What then makes people tick aside from each having a different clock and different objectives in the time available, not a lot. In a desert, we see a mirage and amble towards it, in life we think we see greater relevance in our life than in others. It is so hard to shed the notion that we have a purpose and are on the way to achieving something that makes all the effort worthwhile.

Open a tap and fill a bowl with water then me, you, anyone can stare at the reflection and see that a life is as transient as that image. Tap the bowl and watch the shimmering, your waves of beavering, busy, idle interaction that alters but changes nothing in the end. Equally valid and equally worthless are we. Though I

say again, never confuse feeling worthless with less worthy than someone else.

It is a name, a number, a mark in the sand with nothing tangible of us left behind. It is all one big con. Think, ponder, postulate for as long as you like until the light in your head goes out and the chemicals stop flowing. No more curiosity, no more reward and no more self.

Why bring people down to earth? Once an appreciation of the ultimate futility is understood and becomes a feature of a person's core, they can then find a firmer ladder to climb. After which a product of utility for all might manifest itself. No That is a joke too. We are a fruit from the flower from the tree. We start underripe, become ripe, soften, wrinkle then rot and smell. We have a shelf-life – a sweet one.

The best day of my life

I hadn't budgeted enough time to de-ice the car, but with a minute to spare I arrived at the agreed time. She was sitting outside waiting with the dog. We had always respected one another in terms of good time keeping. Lots stood out that day. It is not what we do, but who with. Seeing things through someone else's eyes is refreshing for me. Hearing their thoughts about things that I take for granted.

Little things, little differences - massive impact. As I called her name she turned and beamed. This was a response that I had not been accustomed to. In other relationships a half smile would be witnessed, occasionally. Here a true meaningful, genuine smile caught in a series of shots. Modern life, modern technology captures things that were practically impossible in years gone by. Such reactions were only stored in our heads.

The dog in tow is big, powerful, and not keen on other dogs. I understood how the person on the end of the lead was frightened of her running away and exercised caution. The consequences of something terrible happening were real. But here on my patch of land, land left to go wild, the dog can run free. It runs to examine, curiosity, it turns around frequently to see where her 'master' is, curiosity once more. This bit of free reign is rewarding for the dog. Had the temporary nature of my interaction with this interactive creature been a little less temporary, I could have harnessed those drives in the dog to good effect. Oh well.

People will say that there is a difference between having sex and making love. There is. Not said to make someone feel most important, not as reassurance about commitment, not extra desire, but genuine cohesion. We bonded deeply via dance first, then conversation and therefore intimacy was a conspicuous extension to that. This love making truly counted, resonated, and will stay with me. I ask myself if I am making a big deal of something that can be commonplace and ordinary. In regards her physicality, that suited my personal preferences perfectly. The reason it counts the most for me was how it arose. The intensity came from the emotional connection that formed gradually over time.

For me nothing surpasses having a sidekick. A person to accompany you on mundane outings, or less mundane things. It is wonderful. If and only if the person gels with you.

Are you one of those that wonders how things would have turned out if were not for one thing? One event, one moment, one error, one mistake, one bit of luck. One collision and a friend of mine ended up spending the majority of his life in a wheelchair.

Problems are relative though and my one thing impacted me greatly. In a moment of madness, I said one stupid thing that had dreadful consequences. It ended something good. Nothing could put it right. Now I am mired in self-pity. An end of a relationship feels no different to a death. Grief that time doesn't heal.

The breakup taught me about hope. Nothing bad happened whatsoever between us, but outside forces won the day. I hoped that we may bump into each other at some point, and I believed it all could be sorted with a short chat. The forces of evil, nastiness and spite that reside in people made that reconciliation impossible. I hoped that one day I could at least make peace with her. In a relationship, some things are important, other things much less so. The list of things that were important to us both coincided most remarkably. It was an absurdly good match.

Harmonious dancing. Harmonious yet challenging conversation. Harmonious sex. I had it on all counts. All with the same person. I found what gives meaning to me. The most meaning. We both listened to one another. We both revelled in physical contact. We pushed the boundaries of dance. It is most difficult to find someone to take dance to the extremes. My stance on equality matched hers. So many compatible factors. Megan epitomised exactly what I had been looking for, for so long. Hope gets me through each day. It gets me through until I cross paths with someone else as great as she. Human connection gives me purpose. Close connection is most meaningful to me. Not much else cuts it. We find our own meaning. It is different. It is personal. It is ours. I found out the hard way that for me in my life, one plus one is not two, it is closer to 11.

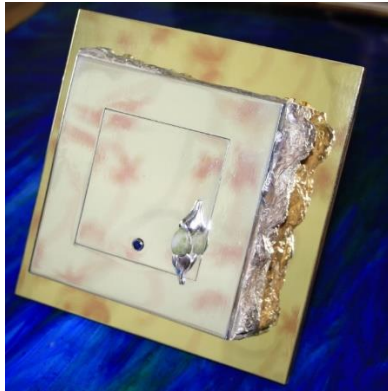
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Each part is taken out of their wrappers, slowly, one by one. All the bits needed are laid out in front of you. Some were difficult to obtain, some cost more than you would have liked, but everything is ready for you to start putting them together. There is a joy to it. You think briefly about those who manufactured and devised each element, but the real focus is on this final process. After all the patience waiting for key parts to arrive, the time is now right and whether with a bit of background music or in silence you begin. Care must be taken as any breakages now will lead to a further postponement. A few spares wouldn't have gone amiss, but you have just enough for the job. An imaginary observer looking over your shoulder is given a running commentary, spoken to in the mind alone. A task undertaken.

The many modes of existence; none of which are more desirable, all are as valid as one another – just different. (a) Hunting, foraging, mating from time to time. On the lookout for dangers. Exploring. Using the drives in a pure form. (b) Building and creating. Having a belief that you are moving forward. As one reward subsides, another is thought to be on the horizon. Real life, clear reality. Witnessing the actual physical manifestation of tangible products. Making solid additions to mankind's capability. Your fear of being scolded by those holding sway over you is no illusion. The words are more than just sound waves, they impact you. (c) Reflection and meditation. Quiet, inward looking. Analysis. Planning and plotting. Shut the world out and be at one with your mind and body. Refresh, recuperate. (d) Driving the machine. A distinctly different mode. Intruding the process of thinking by intercepting it. Being as far removed from being a human as one can imagine. De-layering. Consciously grasping what is going on inside you. (e) Utilising everything you know to your advantage, often just as a challenge and the fun of it. Only using instinct when you can't calculate the next move in the time available. We can thrive in one mode - at all times. Some can flit between them at will. Such a profusion of modes to not pay attention to.

The zookeeper knows when they are being played. They can pretend to go along with it and make it seem like they have been fobbed off. They take time to think about the response. A zookeeper can swallow their pride on demand, be humble and arrogant when needed. A zookeeper understands the parallel with someone that works in a zoo.

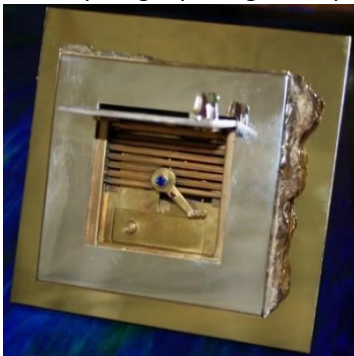
Illustrations



The original concept was a simple box with four doors, something that wouldn't take too long to make. It offered up a chance to do something away from the mundane work work work for money routine.

As things went along it got considerably more involved and time eating. Basic doors evolved into shutters and sliders. Getting each mechanism to work without interfering with one another created lots of issues to solve.

The problem side of things was a big part of the fun; finding solutions the most rewarding. Computer aided design would have made the process much easier as you can see what fits before you make anything. By doing it all by hand, make, fit and test it leans



much more towards art rather than a pure engineering project. That is what I like to think anyway. Nevertheless, I feel that it was only by holding, feeling, shaping and meddling with the metal, could I really come up with an end product of my liking. I do not think that one can expand an initial idea as much when working at the computer screen.

It has absolutely no utility whatsoever, it is not a clock or some handy device, but it may provide a trifling amount of amusement and encapsulates the “what's inside?” vibe.

Making the 4 doors, five mechanisms and frame gave me an insight into using a lathe, milling machine and casting. The hope was to make a near perfect solid silver square box frame. I tried to cast in one go. By using some aluminium angles and casting sand I made a mould. As the frame was to be only 4mm thick I was not able to get a good enough pour to fill the entire mould. After a few attempts another strategy was needed. Maybe if I get four strips of silver and a sheet, I could silver solder it all together. What I didn't take into account is that as you heat the metal to solder it, it expands. It is going to be hard to get all five pieces at the same temperature to avoid any gaps and buckling. Alternatively, a jig to hold it in place is equally awkward to set up.

Screwing it all together seemed unsatisfactory as the thickness didn't seem to be adequate to take the screws. The other problem was that when you buy silver sheet you expect it to be flat. Each piece is far from flat as the guillotine used by the stockist puts an annoying bend in it.

So back to casting again, this time I tried to make four side pieces with a couple of nubbles on each to screw into. Being smaller than a whole frame the casting would not need any vacuum assisted pouring. I managed the first one. It was far from anything a competent foundryman would deliver but it was machinable to my required specifications. The next pour resulted in an explosion probably because the sand was too wet. After picking up hundreds of beads of silver off the floor and putting back into the crucible I thought about pouring into an open mould. The resulting apparition, the return from the dead showing their face arms belly and so forth led me to reconsider the perfect box shape.

Another side was made by heating the silver in situ until it flowed, then running a piece of wood quickly across to get it to flatten adequately. Molten silver doesn't run like water does, instead it has a tendency to form globules and misbehave. Nevertheless, whilst using more silver than simple sheets the result is fine. After endless hours on the milling machine, I sized each piece to fit the top sheet.

When it breaks it is a good thing (sometimes).

For the third time in three weeks something has broken, and the after-effect has been quite positive. Silver is quite malleable and doesn't welcome being milled. Unlike brass, which flakes off nicely it has a propensity to snarl up, smudge rather than machine away. The vibration and noise were gradually increasing, the

amount I was trying to mill (depth) decreased yet still no encouraging result.

You can enter one code to move the mill slowly and another code to move it quickly to another spot. Put the wrong code in when the end mill is too low, and it will fly across and snap instantly. Entering G0 rather than G1 and another expensive carbide bit destroyed. However, with a new bit in the milling was wonderful. Obviously the one I was using was getting blunt and not cutting at all well. Breaking it solved the problem and saved a lot of time figuring out the next move.

I broke a ticket barrier in China the once. The police stopped me in my tracks and told me that I will have to pay for the damage. The train was long gone before I reached a settlement. I showed them that there was a chip in the plastic and suggested that they pay me for missing my train. This reversal of claim did reduce the amount I had to pay to a third. On the other train we met someone who showed us an unbelievably useful item which we bought at our destination and used during our visit.

I broke my tablet and was so disgusted by the internal build, penny pinching components, that I decided that I would buy another type altogether. This led to a different way of working whilst away, one which has become far less painful and increased the time sightseeing, halving the time not. So, serendipity is found in miniature disasters.

Things that don't break completely keep us back from fixing our situation. We stay in a relationship that is so so. Our job is so so. Our life is so so. When we lose our job or split up with a partner, it is truly broken. Then we insert a new drill bit that works so much better than the worn out one. Why wait for it to snap?

Mechanisms

A slider was easily made, just a groove and spring to shut. The small door opener was not too difficult either as it is a simple sprung pull rod.

However, the door catch was not so straightforward. In theory it is just a translation of the up-down pressure to in-out to hold the door. However, with the limited room and problem of it sticking, it was not quick to get right. The shutter proved rather awkward. A simple scheme, but it was far too willing to jam particularly if you pushed it at one side. The square shaped bars bunch up and interlock slightly, randomly and create deep dissatisfaction. The cure was found by opening the curve runner somewhat. The shutter mechanism needs to both keep the shutter up and close it. Here one learns the imperative of getting the brass pieces set to tight tolerances. Even a fraction of a millimetre off and it doesn't work. Initially I had the shutter winding over a roller with

the aim of tensioning the roller to provide the up and down force. I settled for a less elegant wing device instead.

The main heavy silver door needs to be stay open. The point of action would be outside the box. Using the same principle as the other door meant extra work was needed.



Gears seemed the obvious solution. In a factory a gear can be churned out in seconds. On a milling machine it is a harder task. There is most likely software already available that will spew out g-code to direct the mill, but I chose to write my own as the maths would be fun, or so I thought. It didn't take that long once I worked out a scheme and it was gratifying to see the

gear emerge after the mill had done its work.

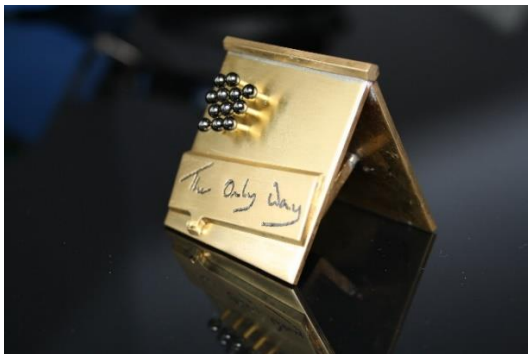
I attempted to mill a logo on a platinum piece using a very fine bit (0.2mm). It worked in principle but each time the mill snapped it was hard to set it back off again from the same place. The assay office kindly laser engraved it instead for a reasonable token sum. Pragmatic decisions win us over. The issue of who really made an artwork question reared its head. Great works which sell for large sums of money are quite often actually made by students and helpers. People will impart large fortunes for something because the name attributed to it is big. Art galleries have vast vaults with thousands of fine paintings that don't see the light of day. This is neither a grand piece nor has it been made to sell so will be stored too until the day it is melted down to make something else.

A sapphire held in a white gold setting and a diamond/red stone rudimentarily set on the lever provide a little distraction.

After some buffing and polishing the item was ready to photograph. Taking a picture of a mirrored surface was unexpectedly troublesome. A front on picture means you can see the camera and the person taking the picture. Even poking the camera through a sheet of white paper doesn't eradicate the problem.

A craftsman could have made something like this with a better finish and in half the time, but an average result is enough at times. For each part in the finished element at least 3 others were made and scrapped. One could copy and reproduce this fairly quickly. However, it is not the making but the devising that shines.

The only way model



Simple item made to illustrate the idea. Milled and drilled, taped and screwed in place. Engraved deep to allow selenium to be melted into the channels. Finding a metal that is black and has a lower melting point than the brass was not forthcoming hence this element with its unappealing odour that lingers in the workroom for days on end was an alternative.

Should illustration



On completion of this little 'art' work I realised that not only am I never going to make anything of any real note, but the process is just a way for me to demystify certain processes that others handle with great aplomb. It is nice to take things to experts to have made, but also to work through the issues wrapped up in doing it yourself. Four days to engrave the little badge. Oh, it would have been so easy to get a stencil made and quickly sandblast it on. Instead coding to drive the engraving machine and fruitless attempts to get it to work. As always it is knowing how, in this case that the carbide bit need only breathe on the glass to get the marking neat and uniform. Too much depth

caused the mill to burn out and fail half way round. Any attempt to restart just created more mess. Ten sheets later this was worked out and just .01 mm on the Z axis makes all the difference in the world.

The ability to cut glass and do the lead work is bound to come in useful later and at the second go it became satisfactory. Just hard work figuring out how to bend the lead into a nice curved shape around the glass. Simply forming across ever thinner brass rods proved better than any mechanical device devised. The glass stringers were bent and fused at their ends. Lampworking, bead making, and glass sculpting is uncomplicated to start off and maybe after many years of practice would produce items of much greater significance, but this is sufficient for this illustration.

Cover

I thought I would have another go at some casting. A simple plate that anyone who knows about this kind of thing could easily complete in a few days. I understand that the procedure for casting items goes back thousands of years and it seemed to take us about that long to get even marginally acceptable results. Paying someone else to do it is not only ten times cheaper but would have produced something far better. All the gear and no idea. Sand casting just never came close. Mixing sand and plaster of Paris showed promise, but even ignoring the odd mould exploding, created never ending pitting and cast defects.

So on to using molochite. It all looks so straightforward, but just getting a wax copy to start with can take days. There are so many types of wax to waste time on. You can use a machine to make a master then use some resin to make an inverse copy. Then you pour some hot wax into this resin mould. Frustratingly, it will then either curl up or hundreds of bubbles will form. So, you put in a kiln and then sweep all the bubbles out whilst still inside. Then take out and put some weight on top allowing it to cool. There will always be one letter that is just not right. Carving wax, green lost wax, paraffin candle wax, bees wax on it goes until I hit on microcrystalline wax which is the least difficult one to use for this application.

What I did learn from all the failed use of various types of moulds including the very expensive delft clay, is that the gate system is bountiful. A cone and a gate system with a counter intuitive thinness makes for a nice metal run and reduces the probability of surface defects. Watching others add a simple hook to the end to hang the item to dry between coats is yet one more example of how an obvious problem can be addressed. These moulds with or without wax in are fragile until the metal is poured in and has cooled. I would stand them up but even after a few were knocked over the solution didn't register. The actual part where you pour

the metal is quite straightforward. Having some nice lifting and pouring tools is great. Paying for all the things needed is the easy part. Exactly the same at the dentists, handing the money over, an amount some people find quite high is the simple bit. I would pay double if you could skip the part where you have to sit in the chair. Whack a spoon full of borax and a load of slag coagulant once molten and get someone to help lift the crucible out of the furnace into your holder.

I was asked why I didn't machine the thing out of a flat brass block. That was a possibility and although it would have taken a long time, maybe a week or two it was far better to spend the best part of a year doing it this way as I just wanted to 'master' casting. Why gold plate it when you can just use a spray can? Well, why not do it the way we want to, you do. When telling people about using a furnace outside some asked if can you do it indoors. You could but not if you like to keep somewhere to live. It is all about making incremental improvements (changes) and keeping at it. So too with this book. Seven editions now taking it from really awful to marginally ok.

Dig some clay from the ground. Place in a bucket and add water. Use a handheld cement mixer. Pour off the liquid through a sieve into a small tub. Tip the contents slowly into a larger container, turning tub gradually as you go leaving traces of unwanted material on the sides. Leave to settle then repour the whole lot one tub at a time for second pass. Each refilter will purify further. Place a cloth in a flowerpot and fill with this clay slip. In a few days depending on the temperature, you will have usable clay. A thin film will sit between the clear water and clay which can be syphoned off. The amount is often insubstantial but when concentrated becomes very good quality compatible glaze. Brush on when your artwork is quite dry and only one firing is needed.