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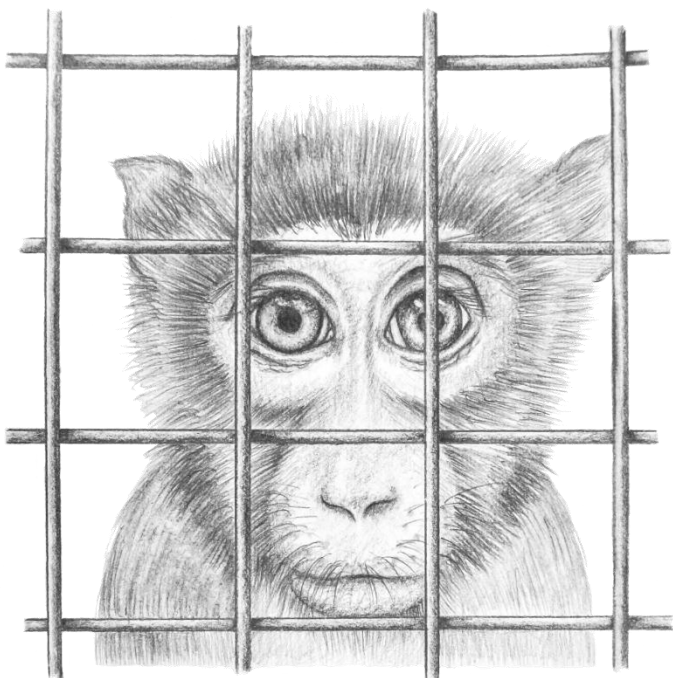
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Jeremy

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 will take you on a journey. Inside of yourself. To look at the meaning of life question. By the end you will know more about yourself than ever before. You will discover what drives you. You will see what drives you to do great things and what drives you to do simple small things. What drives you day in day out, no matter who you are. There are drives, deeply 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. Knowledge is power say some. Knowledge is helpful is it not? Understanding you and why you want to do things is very useful knowledge.

What sparks your enthusiasm to go out and do something. What aids your enjoyment of things? Certain drives encourage you to buy certain things. These drives encourage you to give to others. These drives encourage you to help others. Drives are connected to favours, fortune and frivolity. Why do you make such an effort to travel. What makes you so keen to visit someone? Why are most of us so keen to make new friends and meet new people. Lots of whys and an underlying reason for them all. Today is another fine day, another day older and perhaps another day wiser. Understanding the drives within you will make you wiser for sure.

Answering the question of what drives us helps us answer that notable question, namely what is the meaning of life? Certain drives give us meaning. Certain drives give us purpose. Many fine texts leave you a little underwhelmed. The answers various people put forward in regard the meaning of life are usually good, but never great. Some people fudge their answers to big questions like this. Some leave you with more questions than you started with. Some answers are hazy, and many are incomplete. There is a good reason why you bother at the end of the hard-earned day. There are things that help you keep the belief. Life can be hard at times. Life can be fantastic. Life can be a struggle. Life can roll along nicely. Whatever situation you are in you are free to sit and contemplate. During periods of contemplation, we often ask why we bother.

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 and 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.

Consider your sex drive. The sex drive stems from base drives. Our sex drive fans out, spreading into a plethora of desires. We may be drawn towards people of a certain colour, people of a certain size, or people of the same gender. We may like sex in certain places or sex with more than one person at a time. We may be content with sex on our own. Sexual activities vary but the underlying drives willing us, pushing us, drawing us towards various forms of sex is a constant. The sex drive is underpinned by more basic drives. There are things that make it satisfying and will us to explore it. You may have a considerable sex drive or none whatsoever. Those with a lower sex drive will have some other activity that stands in place of it. Whilst you may intensely crave sexual liaisons, someone else may get equal pleasure from eating a bar of chocolate. Chocolate can 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 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 basic drives influence all aspects of our psychology. The wish to solve a problem in psychology involves the basic drives. These drives act on us from birth until death. A baby looks for a toy to play with, an adult toys with the

idea of obtaining things to make life better. Both toddlers and adults search for things. Both toddlers and adults explore their surroundings, paying greater attention to things that intrigue them.

Life takes a linear course. 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. No matter what you achieve you won't be here forever. There may be plenty of friends, acquaintances, and those in the spotlight that achieve more than most, but they die too. We may strive to accomplish lots of things in the timeframe given to us. Some of those things will seem to have a higher purpose. You might look back and think that you could have done more in your life. You might look back and believe that you struck the perfect balance between time spent creating/building and time spent enjoying frivolities. The wish to achieve things relating to a higher purpose is rooted in the basic drives. Some of us search for meaning. Ironically, this search also stems from our basic drives.

This understanding of these drives will be fruitful to all. You may have half-known about these drives already. Now you have a chance to get to understand them fully. They say knowledge is power. It is, and sometimes knowledge is more than that. I am sure many of you will have said to yourself, "If only I had known that when I was younger". Knowledge makes a significant difference to how we get through life and yet all of us could have spent time to save time. Instead of taking the time to learn powerful things we waste time on time wasters. It can be a challenge to determine who is worth listening to though. Understanding the drives may help a little in this regard. You will see why you were seduced by timer wasters. You will grasp their motives.

There are things we find out and things we never find out. We die not knowing. This doesn't matter. Not at all – not in the grand scheme of things. Luck, chance, and fortune can alter what we discover. We gain awareness. I am not talking about anything deep or complex necessarily. It can be simple things, ordinary things. Nobody learns all there is to know. What we do learn in regards useful knowledge is miserly. We probably learn just enough to feel satisfied that we found out enough to make the best of it. Those that learn ten times as much as you will die too. They will die not knowing many things. Much of what they didn't discover would have been irrelevant anyway, but some things they could have learnt would have had an impact on their lives.

Knowledge of how to use a tool. Knowing that a tool exists. Knowing dates of certain events, the timeline. The cause and the effect. Academia. Knowledge takes many forms. Knowing that

someone liked you. Knowing that someone would have given you something. Lots of things that you know about or are never aware of. There are many forms of ignorance, unawareness. Sometimes this ignorance is a result of stupidity, but usually not.

Knowing certain things enables us to do, to try, to explore in different places. Had we known about these things before, 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.

The drives in all of us

Let's begin. Let's look at these drives. Let's see them in action. Let's see the affect they have on us in 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?

Who will be the next leader. Will they raise taxes again? Which tax will they raise first. How much have I got saved now. How long will it take to get enough to buy what I want? When is the wedding. Who is invited. Why did they not invite me. What dress will she wear. Who invented this. Could it be made more cheaply. Could it be made better. Do they do it in other colours. Why are they being racist. Why did they pick on me. Why is the sky blue. Who is at fault. Who shall I blame. Can I get there in time. Can I complete my assignment without cheating. Can I get help from somebody. Who will help me. What will they want in return. Will it impress or will it make me look cheap, or unoriginal. What is the word for being kind without wanting the favour returned. How many words are there in the dictionary. Why is my mother so grumpy. Why did my sister rob all my savings. Why can't life be simpler. Why are things so jolly unfair. When will the time come. Will disaster strike if we don't change things. What is the meaning of life.

Curiosity may have killed the cat, but curiosity is life. Curiosity inspires the will to live. What is the best way to spoil someone's enjoyment of a film? Tell them how it ends. Take away the suspense. We are glued to the screen in anticipation of what may happen. We watch as we have the desire to know how things turn out. We are inclined to throw a book away, part way through when we no longer care how the story evolves. We hear people use the term curiosity from time to time but never 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 not solely brought to bear in large scale investigations. Curiosity drives all investigations big and small. 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. However, they use the same curiosity mechanism. The only difference between wondering whether the water has boiled or why the bridge collapsed 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.

You may suspect Aunt Mable is having an affair. If so, who is she having an affair with. We may also wonder about her marriage and why she was inclined to cheat. Is it a fling. Will it be a brief encounter that will not last long. Is she going to get a divorce. One fact and lots of questions surrounding it. Some of us will care far more about Aunt Mable's affair than others. Some will see these types of discussions as mindless gossip. Having little interest in the marital affairs of others doesn't mean you have less curiosity overall. In many cases our curiosity depends on how it affects you. If an affair means you may lose your inheritance or be kicked out on to the street your curiosity will be magnified. An event may affect us, and we delve into the details to work out what to do. In order to work out what to do we ask questions; we find out things - all using the curiosity machine in our head.

We all have things to worry about. Our curiosity points in different directions. You may like to be kept informed about 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 are formed. We will always care about our own neurons the most.

Neurons get changed in your head when you find out about major events. Neurons get changed in your head when you find out about trivial matters. Regardless of the impact to the wider world, regardless of the significance of what has happened, links are made, links are moved, links are removed. Links inside your head. Our neurons, our actions, our bubble, our world in our head. All powered by curiosity. 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. A child looks for their toy. An adult looks for friends and foe. A child may get frustrated when they can't find something. An adult gets frustrated when they don't know where the killer is. Those frustrations are gaps in our knowledge. A gap in our knowledge can mean people die or get injured. A gap in our knowledge might only mean getting home late. Either way it is the same system in our heads that make us fill in our lack of knowledge. Where can I get a tin of paint from, uses the same mechanism as where can I get a better weapon from.

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. We may not let it go until we solve the mystery. Looking for lost treasure is another example. Looking for a bounty held on 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 someone ten times the value of the golden object to be told where it is. They are not so much interested in having the object but knowing where it is. They want to know what the clues meant. They want to know how close they were to finding it. They want to know if they were on the right track.

Look how we fret when we are dumped. We want an explanation. We consider all the possibilities. Was it something we said. Was it because of how we behaved. Was it 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. Did the person that left us know certain things? Would an explanation recover the situation? Curiosity leaves us in turmoil. Being told the reason for a breakup, the main reason, enables us to move forward. We mither, worry, pull about what could have been as we are uncertain about key facts.

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. We may be given an explanation but have some doubts. If doubts linger, we will do some research. We will re-examine the evidence. We will be curious until those doubts are gone.

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. Curiosity inspires us to visit places we haven't been to before. We want to experience different cultures. We want to see sights that we have heard about but not seen. Will it be like what we imagine it to be? 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? Our days are spent contending with vast numbers of micro curiosities. Our weeks spent on bigger curiosities, ones that are more involved. Our years on great unknowns. Which button do I press to get the lift door to shut? Is the yogurt still edible. How can I balance the budget. How can I move forward with my venture. What do I really want from life. What matters the most.

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 basic drives that come into play as well.

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 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 did the team manage to equalize. Others have absolutely no interest in who scored, who won or whether the football match 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 need to be curious about something.

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 holds a vast conglomeration of links. Most links link nicely, but some lead to gaps. 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. We do that by rearranging links and sorting out the gaps. Each day we refine the links and fill more gaps. Some gaps appear fleetingly. Other gaps 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. We create a set of beliefs. Curiosity can be sated, satisfied, with anything that seems to fit the gap. It needs 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 damage they can do is far beyond what we can imagine in our heads. Large puffs of sand and smoke rose from the hillock in front of me as the obliterative effect of the stream of bullets smashed their way forward. It needs to be seen for oneself to appreciate how staggering it was. Curiosity is multi-sensory. First-hand experience counts. We need to see things with our own eyes, at the scene, to get a true understanding of things. Those that wonder about love can only have their curiosity satisfied on that subject by immersing themselves in a meaningful way with someone. No fairytale book can do the same. 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 when 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. What we hold in our head is data. Data is data, nothing more. The data we store in our heads fits with what we believe or want to believe. We can function quite well as a human being with lots of data missing, lots of erroneous data and even data that contradicts other data. Each piece of data filled a gap in our curiosity. It did the job.

When you look out of a 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. The first micro-curiosity asks what it is that is moving. 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 every day for a whole week. They do so avidly and quite happily. 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 go down them. So, we may create some variation. We might try completing that jigsaw puzzle upside down or in a faster time to boost the exhilaration but sooner or later, even with those extra challenges, 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 the boredom. We want the bigger rewards that are found by overcoming it. We may have to search long lists, examining many possibilities. We may need to process a vast amount of research to find an answer. We can force ourselves to overcome the power of boredom, but boredom 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. It was 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. One ideology that matter above all else. A mixture of mind-washing and becoming mind-awash. Full to the brim of things related to one point of view. Some cleaning, washing, but mainly filling, so much so that the victim is awash with ideas stemming from one doctrine. 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? Those that do uncover other paths, find them blocked and forbidden by those in control.

Loneliness. People self-imprisoned at home. No company or very little company. Few rewarding conversations. Areas of our curiosity nagging with only our own self to discuss things with. No opportunity to see if other people agree with our latest postulation. Boredom is coupled with loneliness. One can have all the curiosity in the world but what help is that if you have very few ways to satisfy it.

We crave continuity. We need not ask introductory questions with those we already know. We have continuity with relatives and friends and need not ask what is your name, where do you live, what brings you here. Those are boring questions. We value being able to delve a little deeper sometimes. That is easier with those that are already familiar with our background. Curiosity is a huge web. We want to explore the whole web rather than tread the same ground too often. Treading the same ground 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.

People will hide information to draw you in. Curiosity will stop you flicking to the next item.

Paths

New roads are built to bypass busy sections. New roads create smoother shorter 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, smoother, 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 is not the only thing that gives us the impetus to solve a problem. There are other things too, but curiosity will be there somewhere. When that problem is solved, we are rewarded. A chemical reward is released in our mind/body. That chemical reward is manufactured and let loose 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 it up a bit. Baked, boiled, chipped, mashed and so on. 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 well enough to go out is bad enough, not having the choice is more dispiriting. Reward needs change. Many will do roughly the same set of things on the same set days. Having said that many will do

those same things but with different people or in different places which reduces any boredom a little.

Learning new skills is rewarding. We practice those skills becoming more masterful by the day. Initially, our rate of improvement is quite considerable. However, as time goes by the rate of improvement declines. It takes the same amount of effort to get from stage six to stage seven as it did to get from the start to stage six. Ever more effort in to get a little bit better. That can make the thing we are doing a little boring. Not only does the rate of improvement wane but we exhaust all the variations and diminishing curiosity is to be found within that field. We have seen it all. Nothing new, nothing different, little change and thus the pursuit, the hobby, the sport can be less rewarding than it once was. We need both curiosity and reward to motivate us. Are you interested in seeing the same, same, same, endlessly. Do you enjoy unpredictability over predictability. Something predictable by definition means you know the outcome. Knowing the outcome is the opposite of curiosity and wondering what will happen.

Whilst boredom can set in when we hit our limits, we may still like to show off our mastery. That is irrespective of whether we are set to get even more masterful. Taking pride in something, showing off our mastery, demonstrating what we can do is rewarding.

I have asked many people what they think drives them. Survival often comes up. Most want to survive. Not all, all of the time of course, but those that want to end it today are in the tiny minority. In some busy railway stations signs have been put up that read, 'do not jump during rush hour'. No matter what time they jump in front of the train, it is rather annoying. It delays the train for quite a while. It is frustrating. People have places to go, people to meet, dinners to cook and this selfish person has delayed everyone at this station and beyond. Half an hour passes and people become angry. Why are the trains still not running? The railway workers announce that they are looking for the head. The body has been bagged up and is ready to be sent to the morgue, but the head is not where they expect. This news tends to quieten down those complaining a little. A selfish person jumping in front of the train and selfish people in the vicinity caring more about being delayed than the life departed.

The number of people taking their own life is higher than we would like but statistically speaking, suicides are quite rare. The rate may reach one person in every ten thousand per year. Most people want to live. Most people want to survive. Some naïvely relish the idea of surviving a plague, or civil uprising as they believe life will be testing, dramatic and challenging. It won't be

as fun as we dream it would be. Fights, food running out, only bad water to drink. Surviving is hard when hardship befalls us. It will be surviving rather than thriving.

Those, namely the majority of us, want not only to survive but to thrive too. We are not focusing everything on just making it to the next day intact. We want things in life. We want to expand our lives. We want to build things. We want to see things. We want to try things. We want to add to the sum total of all that humanity can offer. We want to help people. We want to help animals and maybe do something positive for the ecosystem. I am sure you can think of a thousand other reasons for wanting to survive.

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 though. 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 motivates us. We have hopes and aspirations. We strive for more. We do lots to 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? Putting procreation forward as a core drive 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. Young children are not thinking about procreating. Nor do we 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 grandparenting 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. People are driven whether they have children or not. Procreation is not a universal drive. Whether children we have were planned or not, curiosity and reward come into play. 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 our children 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. We can love a child, ignoring how devious they are. 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.

From negative ideas come untold positives – that is 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 your genes is a fantasy. You may have a regal bloodline, you may be 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. What happens during your life is going to seem more important than what went on before and what will happen after. Your grandparents thought that too. As will any ancestors.

Bringing up a child, making them lively, happy and creative is a marvellous thing to witness. If that child happens to be fathered or mothered biologically by someone that is not you, then take comfort in the fact the nurture is as important as nature. There is a positive to be found in the understanding that genes are transient. Your genetic code exists whilst you remain breathing but disappears thereafter. Only some of your genetic code is utilised in procreation. The great thing about great grandchildren is how greatly your genes get diluted. That enables you to stop worrying about the need to spread your seed.

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 in 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. The devil is in the detail for one comes to the realisation that curiosity and reward feed one another. Fill a gap and you feel the reward. The reward feels good, so you want to explore more.

Curiosity has different scales, different levels and some curiosities linger far longer than others, as does 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. By 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.

A threat induces a fear of imminent pain from violence heading your way. Avoiding pain is for who's benefit?

The reward mechanism is a bio-chemical system hence it can be played with directly. We can mess with our reward system 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 behave in a similar way. Instant reward that is as addictive as 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 and those rats need a novel distraction to get them off the drugs. A more exciting environment helps considerably.

Put five female rats in a box with one male rat. The male will mate with them all. He will mate regularly for a while until he gets bored by them. The sexual desire wanes. Maybe he tires of their perfume. Introduce a new female and the desire to mate with her is instantly sparked. Do we see a similar pattern in humans? You bet we do. Variety is the spice of life, namely, change, is powerful in both us and rats.

When we don't get our drug hit from rewards, what happens? Does our mood sink. Do we start a downward spiral to a more depressed state. There is a comedown from rewards released inside of us, in the same way as a drug addict feels the pain of abstinence. The fix is not quick. One needs to have plenty of rewards in the pipeline. Arrange to meet with people perhaps, arrange to do things, arrange things that gives you a sense of progress.

Rewards are found during and after a wide range of activities. Conversation is one key area where reward is to be found. Face to face works best. When face to face one can gauge reactions

and examine body language. The type of conversation matters, good conversation is more rewarding. Listening to a one-way monologue is less likely to be rewarding than a two-way conversation. 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.

One may decide to ignore the two ears, one mouth rule by not using your ears twice as much as your mouth. You may not give others much of a chance to speak. That is one form of selfishness amongst hundreds of potential examples we could provide. Selfishness is everywhere including motherhood. Mothers have to be selfish. Labelling a mother as selfish doesn't seem fair, but mothers have no choice. If they want to lactate, produce milk to breastfeed, they must eat and drink themselves. They must look after themselves first. 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 both win from the selfishness of the mother.

Looking after yourself is not 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 first and foremost however this enables her to feed the child. What do people say to me when I tell them that mothers can't help being anything but selfish? "I suppose so." There is no suppose about it. It is a fact of procreation.



Selfishness is something we try to avoid. Yet we can't avoid being selfish. 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. Those that do nothing bar things for themselves 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. In the hunter gathering days prior to mass scale food production the men went out to hunt. The women would feed their men before they left. The women give the best portions, the best slices, the most food to the men. The men got priority. At first glance the women appear kind, considerate and generous. They are to some extent. In this hunter gathering community men take 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. The more they give the more they get.

Either way

I watched her approach people, one by one, asking for money. Most people standing about waiting for the train in this grimy underground railway station ignored her. Many may feel perfectly justified to turn their gaze away and pretend the beggar does not exist. I gave her an apple though. I did not ignore her. I did not shoo her away.

If you think that I gave that lady an apple because I am far more generous, far more compassionate than all the others waiting for the train that day, you are quite mistaken. On the surface it seems that I was more generous, but lots of things go through our minds in these situations.

If I give her a small tokenistic thing like that apple, she will move on straight away. That means that I gave her something to stop her bothering me anymore. That is a benefit, of sorts, to me. I give and she stops pestering me. We both gain. We might feel a little guilty if we shoo her away. Giving her an apple avoids that feeling. That is a benefit to me. I give and feel less guilty. We both gained. I may feel like a better person, and she got an apple.

It can get complicated when we analyse trifling situations deeply. Those that give may encourage her to remain at the station begging. If no one gave her anything then perhaps she would seek employment somewhere instead. If everyone ignored her, she would need to find another way to get money and food. I don't

care that much as I am on holiday and not likely to be affected by these beggars long term. Is that selfish? Most probably. It will be someone else's problem, not mine.

Sometimes we give in order to be seen as kind and caring. Sometimes we can be genuinely helpful when giving to beggars. Whatever the case, there is potential for us to both gain. They get the help, and you get the satisfying feeling inside you.

Whatever you do, an element of selfishness arises. Selfish for ignoring a beggar. Selfish for wanting to avoid feeling a little guilty for not giving to the beggar. Selfish for giving so that it gets the beggar away from you. And still selfish if giving makes your feel proud and decent. Whatever the case, no matter what you do it might seem that you can't win. 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.

We are selfish if we ignore the plight of someone in need. Selfish if we could give but choose not to. Selfish if we give to stop us feeling a little guilty. Selfish if we are kind and generous. You are selfish in every scenario. We could evaluate the need. We could decide that the beggar has enough already. What I want you to evaluate is the one special aspect of selfishness when we give gladly. When we give something or help someone, we feel good inside. Not always, but there is potential to feel good when being kind and caring. The beggar gets the gift, you get a chemical release inside your mind and body. That is a significant aspect of humanity. Two parties gain at the same time. The two parties get two very different things. The receiver gets the physical gift, and the giver gains a warm feeling.

No matter what you do in this realm, it will have an impact on you. Sometimes the impact is not terribly great. We may brush off a beggar paying scant regard to their presence. 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. Your choice has an impact on both of you. Two people. Two parties. You consider yourself and you consider the other, or not as the case may be.

Two gents head towards a wine bar. They were approached by a vagrant. One gave the vagrant a small amount of money. The other said, "You do know he will probably spend that on drink and drugs, don't you?", "Indeed", replied the other, "We are out tonight to spend money on drink and drugs too."

We form habits. Some give regularly to those asking for help. Others refrain. Many rely on experience. Automatic behaviour sets in. We stop pondering about whether to give or not. We act quickly rather than spend a lot of time thinking about whether we

shall or shall not give in certain situations. We do it so often that we pay little attention to it. Most find that giving is often the best option all round. The feel-good factor may fade a little when we give regularly but nevertheless, we like to feel that we are a good person. We care about ourselves. We care about our image. These factors outweigh the cost of giving. Selfishness embraces all aspects of our existence. Selfishness is a factor in all that we do. Selfishness is predominantly positive.

Me and how it affects me

A super fine husband had an accident. He was rushed to hospital where the doctors and nurses stabilised his condition. After a few months he was able to breath without mechanical assistance. However, it became apparent that there was very little chance that he would make a full recovery. In fact, he was unlikely to regain consciousness. He was in a deep coma. He underwent scans and they revealed that his mind was damaged beyond belief. Only a small part left intact. The doctors came to a stark conclusion; they believed that any hope of a meaningful recovery was most doubtful. 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 began the arduous task of feeding, watering, washing, and dealing with his ablutions. She managed to keep this up 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. 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.

Imagine if he did recover. Imagine how great she would have felt. She would have been the one to take the glory. She would have felt magnificent. She would be vindicated and able to show the world that she held firm and did the impossible. She could have told everyone about how 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. The parents of these children can find themselves in a bind. They want to do as much as they can. However, the level of support that they give to the child takes a toll. It is incredibly hard work and unrelenting. A break from it becomes quite inviting. The parents feel guilty

though if they take a break away from it. They feel bad for having a rest. It can be difficult to summon the courage to take a weekend break from it. A trip to a health spa maybe. Whilst going away for a while means a little guilt and sense that you are not giving it your all, when you come back from the retreat you are refreshed. Someone that is frequently refreshed provides better care. One needs to look after oneself first. You can't look after someone else if you are in not in a fit state to do so. You need to be a little selfish. Any charity work you commit to is not sustained when you burn out. You may wish to work every hour you can for the charity, but all work stops if it makes you ill. If you balance what you give and what you set aside for yourself, you can do more overall for others.

Two parties are considered. The care givers and the child. The charity and the charity worker. One gets the help, and one gets reward chemicals released inside them. Helping others is rewarding, but there are limits to the amount of help you can give. Give too much and it becomes detrimental to your own wellbeing. You have to be selfish. One may act in a self-considerational manner, eating well, taking breaks and allocating time on self-care. You need to look after yourself, if you want to sustain the help that you provide. It is also selfish in that the self gets the reward from giving. It is not a mean-spirited type of selfish, but selfish, nonetheless. The self receives the reward.

You could outsource the care of your child to someone else. That would give rise to another selfish conundrum. Someone else would need to put in the work. I suspect it would depend on your sense of obligation. Do you feel you have a duty, a duty to do the care giving yourself. How rewarding do you find it? Many a child is neglected because of standard-selfish desires. The balance is swung far too much in favour of the parents. Children are often neglected because people prioritise their own wishes above their children's. It is standard-selfish if you are neglectful. A vastly different form of selfishness arises when you feel better for being the opposite of neglectful. The amount of consideration you give to the child dictates what form of selfishness presents itself. Being neglectful is not considering the needs and wellbeing of the child so would be put in the standard-selfish category. Providing plenty for a child in terms of time, love and support is considerational-selfishness. Doing something positive for another is positive for you too. Both parties gain, you and the recipient. You get the internal reward, and they get the help.

Standard-selfishness; mean spirited and self-oriented. Someone who is reticent to share. Doing things solely for your benefit. When we do things that are not primarily for our benefit but are largely for the benefit of others, we are using our considerational-

selfishness. That helps motivate us. We are motivated by the chemical reward. We crave pride in ourselves. We crave a sense of satisfaction and purpose. Looking after a child makes you feel needed. It gives you relevance. Having someone depend on you could be a bane, but it is quite often a major pleasure.

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, and your image may improve. Alternatively, you may not tell anyone about it. You don't need recognition for your kindness. You just keep it between the two of you, you felt you did the right thing. You see their gratitude, and this is something that you found pleasing enough. You don't have any guilt for watching them go hungry. No feeling bad afterwards. One way or another you will always gain something from sharing. Albeit something small at times.

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 gathered around. Then 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. 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; crowds lifting buses and lorries to free someone trapped underneath. Lots of people working together for no 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 need not waste time considering what is the right thing to do in all circumstances. We act based on the rewards that we have felt in the past. Our considerational-selfish instinct to do good becomes ingrained in us.

If the lady were to fall between the train and the platform a second time, people would, once again come to help. Gladly. However, a third occurrence would invoke some raised eyebrows – a sense of her becoming a nuisance. There is a point where we like to move away from helping others too much and encouraging them to help themselves a little more.

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 on. Whilst one was inside buying his midnight feast another was outside attempting to straighten a metal bicycle rack. It appeared to have been nudged over by a car. The first youth 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 came out 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 yobs 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 a little less unkempt. We make the world a better place for others, and it gives the individual some satisfaction that they were part of it. Considerational-selfishness at its finest. Cooperating to get a share of the satisfaction.

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 clubbing together is mutualistic. 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. Many of us will feel bad when we don't help when we could have. Not feeling bad 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 recall instances when we felt a bit guilty. We don't want to feel like that again, so we change tact. Changing tact changes who we are, and new habits form so that we can respond quickly, automatically. When we are decent, life runs smoothly. For us. It is always us. Always us that is at the centre of all that we do. That may be seem 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 an afternoon with some school friends and a gaggle of elderly people. It was a scheme set up to bridge the generation gap. They were out in a large park for a

sizable walk. One lady got left behind. The child noticed that one was missing so she backtracked and went looking for her. How kind, how sweet. The child found the old lady quite quickly. As they recognise each other the old lady's face lit up. She was jolly pleased that the child had come back to see where she was. A fantastic heartwarming smile on both of their faces. 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. Curiosity – where is she? Co-considerational- selfishness, thinking about the welfare of the old lady whilst also completing her rounding-up-sheep challenge.

I told you curiosity is in all and everything. Where is the lady. Why has she fallen behind. How can I help someone. Will it make me look good. What is troubling someone. What would help. Will me helping come across as interfering? Who deserves what I have to give. Will they become dependent on regular help. What is the best form of help to give. Who will lose out. Will others become jealous. We are curious about helping and also considering how it impacts us and those being helped. Curiosity links with selfishness and both with reward.

Lots of ladybirds hibernate around my 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 an awful lot. 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. The drive can lead us to become co-operative. Selfishness 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 stand, 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.

Life in the hunter gathering days was potentially more precarious than in modern times. We can assume that all members of the group would need to play their part. We don't know exactly how much free time people had back then. We don't know if food was always in abundance and if there was much room to support those that have little chance of contributing. It appears that those born imperfect were usually despatched. However, there seems to be some evidence that not all were despatched. Some retarded sub-prime types with low verbal communication skills didn't get their lives terminated shortly after birth. They were tended to, for many years. They lived into their teens and beyond. Maybe they were not viewed as slow and retarded but as a gift. Maybe they were treated as a mascot. The notion that the parents and the group were demonstrating upstanding altruistic behaviour is fanciful. If the child was seen as a pseudo-deity, an emblem of hope, people will be willing to respect and treasure such a child. The child would be a focal point and something that gives quite a bit of meaning to all. They give the child time, patience, food and support and they get more than just a warm glow inside them in return. People move mountains on the whims of belief. A standout child, an unusual child gives people a belief in something. That belief helps us cope with all the hum drum daily wrangles. Politics and what we might loosely call tradition could pressure parents to despatch a child that is not fully conforming. Subtle counter-politics can override this at times. Hope and belief and purpose and meaning can be proffered to persuade us that it will be worth it. I dare you to place thriving higher up in your philosophical thoughts above heartless survival and the need to do as much as we can to aid mankind's expansion. People find a balance. We may seek enjoyment from doing things for the sake of it, things that are not related to progress and greater

prosperity. We like that which is satisfying and gratifying. We need not skew everything in favour of wealth and prosperity. Thankfully, emotion trumps logic. A child that contributes little in terms of food production, food gathering, house building and basket making will be a burden. It will place a weight on the rest. However, it can give a group something deep and meaningful to strive for. We don't find archaeological evidence for groups containing large numbers of these non-contributing types as too many tips the balance into starvation. One is a devotion, three is an altruistic disaster.

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. That 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. We do voluntary work for our own well-being. We do it as we like meeting others. We do it to feel involved and included. Voluntary work is underpinned by the consideration-selfish desire to be a better person whilst doing what we believe is good. We want to help the cause, the charity, the people we feed at feeding centres and that is rewarding. We are also interested in the day-to-day shenanigans. That is curiosity at play.

The fact that people are willing to undertake voluntary work shows that people can find the enthusiasm to work without a financial incentive. So too we often find that the places people want to work at are not always the ones offering the highest financial pay out. Many people have found themselves drifting towards lower paid jobs that are more satisfying than higher paid ones. The chemical reward released in us can be valued above an increase in wealth. Seeing our bank balance rise will give us a little high but there are deeper more profound highs to be had. When we see the team, the group, the organisation progress and achieve something we feel collective reward and individual

reward for the part we played. We like being a part of something great. Employers may seek ways to make people feel valued and make their job seem worthwhile. Some companies will do things for the community rather than hand out surplus resources to staff as bonuses. Overall life satisfaction can surpass career advancement. A better work life balance is marvellous compensation for relatively small drops in income.

The lure of more money can motivate us, but money is not the only incentive for doing things. Far from it. We walk our dogs. We mow the lawn. We tend to plants. We play games. We talk to one another. We stroke the cat. We pick up litter. There are lots of things like this that we do which make us feel better for doing them. These things are rewarding, but not financially rewarding. Money has no bearing in these cases. Money is not a basic drive; besides we lived on earth for a long time without money being central to our lives. Did early man have curiosity? Did they wonder what was on the other side of the river. Did they look up at the stars and discuss possibilities? Did they try every fruit and berry to work out which could be eaten without ill effect. Did they experience weird effects when eating mushrooms and then wonder what other organic entities have magic contained? Did they feed some of them to an unruly one to see if it killed them? I am sure they traded. They borrowed and bartered. Wealth of some sort has been with us for quite a time, but it is the selfish desire to accumulate that underpins the striving for more.

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 higher level drives such as the yearning for sex, money, fame, power, survival etc are more individual.

The base drives are in us at the structural level. They reside deep inside us hidden beneath layers of complexity. Structure creates beauty. We see it all around us in the natural world. We see structure in snowflakes. There are untold variations. The variety is incredible. So many variations that each snowflake is near enough unique. You will stumble upon two identical snowflakes periodically in the same way as we have human twins and doppelgangers. While there is huge variety in the structure of each flake, they are all built upon the same basic bonds formed between water molecules. It has a complex name – intra molecular hydrogen bonding. The same bonds, same molecules but a myriad of different repeating patterns. Varied output from the same fundamental properties of water. We are varied too. We look different, behave differently and strive for different

things. However, we have things in common. We have basic drives that are the same no matter who we are.

We have the same drives but have different higher-level aims. Your aim to write a bestselling book is matched by different aims in different people. They may strive to produce the best film, gain a larger audience, change things, improve society, campaign, or make a dent in the ills of those in need. These aims come 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. These things are rewarding. These things have a curiosity element. These things involve the self. We care about our part in them. We get some form of benefit from doing them.

Every pursuit is deeply connected to selfishness, sometimes standard selfishness, sometimes considerational selfishness. You may paint a picture to give to a friend. You showed a little generosity but enjoyed the whole process. Or at least hoped to enjoy it to some extent. Or you completed it to stop them nagging you, pestering you, to get it done. It benefitted you somehow. Likewise, 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 who to give to and when. 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. 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. We seek that rush of chemical reward gleaned from giving. It is the fuel that gives us a burning desire to be incredibly generous. 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, I help you; you help me in return. It is I help you; I feel joy. I give and I feel more connected. I help and I am more at peace with myself. You can take and feel good. You can give to someone else and feel good. You can look after someone and feel good. The mechanism that makes this work is inspired. A virtuous loop of giving and getting a chemical reward inside our mind/body that makes us feel satisfied. It helps us make friends. It helps us become more secure. It gives us something that solitary standard-selfish people miss out on.

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 benefits you. 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, selfishness. Whereas, the gratification, the satisfaction of sex, the drive to make us go and make it happen is a higher-level drive that stems from base drives. Sex 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. We are encouraged to have sex because of curiosity, selfishness and reward.

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.

Cleaners, road sweepers, factory jobs, dull, repetitive work. Menial tasks. Whilst menial, dull and repetitive, lots stick it out for years and years. Happily, stick it out. 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. Providing food, shelter and sanitary ware etc for others is rewarding, satisfying.

Some work can be arduous and unfulfilling. We may glean some reward, but certain tasks leave 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 and it is uplifting. Change the job and it can be marvellous. Whatever job it may be, we do it to satisfy our selfish desires. That can be considerational-selfishness or standard-selfish. For us, us and the community, us and our family, or just us.

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. The gate-crashing sentiment: Being given more reward than you think you deserve. Being given more respect than you think you have earned thus far. The reward system works best when properly coupled with hard work prior. Things that are given to you easily are not as satisfying as those you have worked hard to obtain. Reward and pride are linked. Reward and accomplishments are linked.

Co-considerational selfishness entails helping others. Others can be one person or many and many like the idea of helping the masses. You can help the masses by being involved in religion and politics. Before you can provide any help, you need to scale the political ranks. The higher you go, the more big decisions you get to make. Getting to the top is rewarding. Getting half-way up is rewarding too. Any progress can be rewarding. The higher you go, the greater the benefits there are on offer. Benefits for you the politician, mainly. If you believe that most politicians and religious leaders are there to help us and us alone, you could be living in false hope. Politicians enjoy the process. They glean 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 their pride, their position, their status to make changes that help those they are supposed to serve. Selfishness as always. Not only do they care about keeping all the trappings of high office for as long as possible but focus ridiculous amounts of energy building a legacy. A legacy is the ultimate self-centred, self-appreciating, fleeting folly. The un noble reward. Decency is honesty without seeking credit. Leaving the place in a better state than you found it. Some enter a bathroom or kitchen and wipe things, clean things a little, thereby leaving it a little better than they found it. Others wipe things and clean things a little but scrawl some fancy graffiti on the walls too. I did my bit to make this better and need to make sure you know it was me that did it.

Being thanked for helping is important in the co-considerational selfish system. Thanking someone increases the chance of people helping again. People relish recognition. People do not like being taken for granted. So often we thank people warmly - the first time we are helped. The second time less so. There is a shift from appreciation to expectation. We feel the reward when someone appreciates what we have done for them. Some may not be able to show their appreciation but if you can sense some gratitude, you are much more likely to help again.

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. Showing your gratitude. Getting verbal recognition for one's efforts counts a lot. This type of repayment is felt in the head of the recipient. Reward chemicals and 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. Feeling bad is a negative. Feeling good is a positive. Not feeling bad, is more positive than feeling bad. Not feeling guilty, shifts the needle in the positive direction. Some won't feel any guilt whatsoever if they ignore someone struggling. They may be busy and preoccupied. They may just not care. Those that do stop and help will feel better inside though. Helping creates a positive for you and the person getting the help. There is satisfaction potential in the act of helping.

Selfishness at every turn. That can't be helped. We have a physical body that seeks to maintain itself. It must care for itself to survive. We need to be standard-selfish to keep going, but to thrive and get more from life we can be considerationally selfish. Aside from our appetite for survival and more importantly the wish to thrive, we have a body system that gets 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 basic 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 yourself 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 want to change the world. That would give your life some meaning. How are you going to change the world you may think to yourself, as you mull over the lack of impact you are making so far. How? That is curiosity. You will look using your curiosity at how you can make things better. Will those changes be felt inside your head. They will indeed as those changes will encourage reward chemicals to be released. Is it for your sense of accomplishment? Is it for you as much as it is to be of help to the world? Any higher purpose is riddled with curiosity. Any higher purpose gives you a sense of reward and the harder it is to

achieve the more reward you will feel. All higher purposes will involve self-gain no matter how cleverly one tries to hide it.

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. To get under the hood of the meaning of life question you simply need to monitor your day-to-day actions. How do the drives fit in to why I want to do this? What do I want to find out? What mystery do I want to solve. Why do I want to find something out? To what extent is curiosity – gap filling making you make effort to do. The more often you are aware of why you are doing something, the closer you get to seeing the connection with basic drives and the meaning of life question. Those drives propel you through each day and it is only a matter of seeing them in action, being aware of them. Look for the curiosity element. Decide what reward will be got. Determine the selfishness. Was it standard selfish or co-considerational selfishness.

We have some very kind people walking on the surface of this planet. We also have some that have no empathy for others whatsoever. These psychopathic types are super-selfish. Those that are empathetic get rewards, rewards that are denied to psychopaths. A psychopath enjoys the power and control they have over others, it fulfils their standard-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. One can't devote their whole life to others at the detriment to their own self. Hunger and thirst will ensure that selfishness feeds the self physically and mentally. 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. It is remarkable that you can be kept happy and content simply by a range of chemicals that are stashed waiting to be unleashed inside of you. Animals and human-animals are an amazing manifestation of untold cunning and brilliant small shifts in structure. Each step along the way retaining the reward for gap filling. Each step enabling survival of the species yet room to spare for rewarding those that share, co-operate, help, assist and not be standard-selfish at all times.

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. Core drives are at the heart of all that you do. To fully understand this, 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.

A healthier meal may taste better, that is good for you. It may make you feel less tired and more alert, that is good for you. It may enable you to live longer, that is good for you. What variety can I introduce? Can I boast about how healthy my meals are? Does that improve my social status. A healthy meal is brought to your plate via the selfish, curious, reward seeking drives within you.

Base 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. What we consume differs though. Some food is more gratifying than others. More rewarding. A hot spicy curry for me, a plate of fried oblong sections of potato - with salt, vinegar and crude sugary tomato paste atop for you. The rewards we get depend on our personal preferences. We each have our favourite foodstuffs. Whatever those favourites may be, we eat them for our sake. We eat 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 type of restaurant that you will head for will not be the same as me, but the underlying reason for going to a restaurant will be roughly the same. Curiosity – what is this new restaurant all about. Reward, food hits the spot. Selfishness, often standard selfishness and eating for one's own benefit.

The discovery of these drives is significant. The implications most profound. Why do we look for a purpose in life. Why do we want to know the meaning of life. What drives us to answer those questions. Curiosity of course. Getting an answer would be great for us individually, and most rewarding. The drives make us seek purpose. Our purpose is derived from the drives. 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. Hope that is delivered is wonderful and marvellously rewarding. We think aspects of our life are mystical, yet simple chemistry in your head provides divine sensations.

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.

If you know that we are driven by curiosity, selfishness and reward, one might ask how that can help us. Can that knowledge be actively used to exploit people. Can it be used to improve things. Can it be used to help us with our psychological issues.

One group that ought to spring to mind in regards exploiting peoples' sensibilities are advertising agencies. They want to get our attention. They could shout out a message. They could create moving images that grab our attention. Alternatively, they can do something that taps into our curiosity. Once hooked we will want to know more. Some of the best adverts are those that make us want to know what happens. What films did you watch to the end. What books kept you gripped all the way through. The ones that stoked your curiosity perhaps? The ones that kept you guessing, held you in suspense, made you want to know whether someone succeeded or failed. An advert that makes us question, who, what, why etc can hold our attention far longer than any advert that is devoid of what, why, where etc. If you claim something is cheaper than normal, people will want to know how much cheaper than normal. So, tell them. Not at the start but close to the end of the advert. Curiosity will keep people's attention until the curiosity gap is filled. Your item is different. Do you explain the difference at the start or the end? You need to ensure that know that the difference is important, and drip feed the facts. Once all the facts are known the curiosity ends.

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. Add variety.

Adverts will tap into our rewards system too. Advertisers will attempt to convince you that you have worked hard and thus deserve a reward. More comfort, more status, more something all of which will be connected to the feeling of pleasure and reward. Luxury equates to expensive, therefore more work required to obtain it. Things that took a lot of effort to obtain are more rewarding than things given to us easily. To get a true sense of reward we have to work hard for it. Therefore, luxury expensive items will be worth the trouble obtaining them.

You are worth it, is the tag line. It will make you look better. Advertisers aim at your sense of self-worth. They can make you feel that you are important. You are special. You are different to others. You are unique. We will customise the product for your needs. We can make you stand out from the crowd. We can elevate you above the lowly. We can make you feel included. We can make you feel valued. Aim for the centre of who we are, the self. We can also show that by buying a product we are helping others; considerational selfishness.

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. We avoid feelings of guilt and enjoy 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 good hygiene keeps themselves 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 believe all facets of humans and humanity have a reason. A reason for being there. That does not seem to be the case. Some things are incidental and serve no purpose in relation to the survival of the species and procreation. Do iso-sexual people help or hinder the cause? They neither help nor hinder, they are irrelevant. Iso-sexuality has no major evolutionary effect. If most mothers were limited to two/three children, iso-sexuality could stymie population growth. However, the biggest factor regarding population growth has been infant mortality. Where diseases and illnesses have been brought under control the population has burgeoned, aided by mothers having in excess of ten children sometimes. Iso-sexual persons make up a small percentage of the population so make little difference. Many iso-sexual sorts deceive a partner. They live a nauseous lie, have children anyway, regardless of their iso-sexual persuasion.

Some evolutionary changes have helped a species expand. The rest are incidental. Evolution will find greater efficiency, greater reliability through trial and error. Honeycomb hexagons demonstrate this. However, the errors and trials take time, lots of births and lots of deaths. The faster something breeds, the more efficiencies you will find. Some trials make a difference whilst most have a negligible effect on how a species expands or contracts.

Whilst many features brought about through evolution are unnecessary for population growth, the drives are necessary. They are vital to our existence as a species and our existence as an individual. Our curiosity encourages 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. Curiosity leads to a more varied diet. That offers us the greatest chance of living healthily. 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 spreading further afield. We began to seek out new lands to invade. A grander type of curiosity than others for sure.

The mechanism behind curiosity in all its forms is akin to the concept of a wheel. All wheels perform the same function whether attached to a train, a car, a bicycle, a tractor, or a shopping trolley. 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.

Small wheels, big wheels, slow wheels, fast turning wheels. Small curiosities, large curiosities. Curiosities that linger, curiosities that need addressing immediately. Curiosity powers the panic we occasionally have when we want to know - 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. There are things 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.

How many of us have lived for years in ignorance. Blissfully unaware perhaps. Do you want to be more confident about what to do, what to avoid and what path to take. Do you want to be confidently true to yourself? If so, then what will provoke you to finish the book? Curiosity possibly. Will it be rewarding. Will it be for you and possibly so that you can help others too.

Should

You should not belch after a meal say those with more decorum than you. You follow their guidelines and belch no more. You tell your own children that belching is bad manners. This is the primary way in which manners are fed from one person to another. However, when you visit lands far away you are surprised to learn that belching is not frowned upon. Quite the reverse. Belching is regarded as a signal to the cook that the food is good. Belching is a compliment rather than a rude gesture. Who is right? Maybe we should belch in some countries but not in others. No matter who is right we learn something important. Manners are not universally adopted around the world. Manners differ. Manners follow trends and fashions. Manners change. When people tell you what you should do, they are following current guidance. That guidance is not fixed forever. Far from it. Who decides upon that guidance? What qualifications does one need to update the guidance? Each university preaches different guidance. We have traditions. We have customs, but who started these customs and traditions. Who was the first to belch and declare it to be a fine compliment. Who decided that it was not acceptable.

Guidance is very arbitrary. You are being guided by guidance that may have no rational basis whatsoever. The keeping your elbows off the table rule may have stemmed from times where an elbow resting on it may have tipped it, tipping lots of food to the floor. If that were so, fine, but we have better tables now, so why continue enforcing a rule that harks back centuries and is no longer relevant.

People will run amok if not controlled. Control requires conformity. Control needs complicity; complaint individuals. Those that do not comply are squashed, silenced or removed from view. Eject troublemakers. Don't let them speak. Don't let them live the way they want to live. Force your opinions on others. Make them comply with threats of violence if they do not.

Aside from our parents, where else are we subjected to countless should and should not's? Schools for sure. Religions most definitely. Half the books written contain umpteen examples. Many films. Many theatre productions. Adverts. We are being told what we should and shouldn't do by so many people. Sometimes the directives are quite direct. At other times, subtle persuasion is used. Story tellers cast goodies and baddies. The goodies set examples for us to follow. Writers want to influence us. To change our behaviour. They want us to adopt their practices. The characters portrayed in the stories are used to

nudge us to be like them in certain regards. So many stories, fables and articles that get published contain coercion. The writers and authors of these stories attempt to get you to be like them. They 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. Their commentary mirrors their moral code. People highlight certain stories, deliberately playing down the importance of others.

Language policing

The meaning of words changes. New meanings can be added to words. Obscure words can become more widely used whilst other words drop into obscurity. Language evolves. Within that evolution, words can imply things that they did not before. Unwritten rules emerge with varying degrees of acceptance. Some words become swear words - in some languages, in some parts of the world. Whilst people may consider a word to be a swear word, they fail to justify why they should not be used. We should not swear in front of children say some. That is odd. They may be the least offended by a swear word. They may find swear words amusing rather than offensive. We are trained by tradition to refrain from using some words. Swear words may make us appear uncouth. That could be a reason for being told not to use them, particularly in a formal context. However, what you find uncouth others may find endearing. Context matters, how we say something matters, but most importantly opinion matters the most. Opinions differ though. Popular opinion can prevail - for a while at least.

People will scold you for using words that they consider to be racist, ageist or blasphemous etc. Whilst people have a firm belief regarding the valid use of certain words, there is no globally recognised body that has any right to determine what words are appropriate to use or not use. The words which seem permissible to describe something, or someone are not set in concrete. They change. When a new word/phrase is proffered in exchange for a contentious one, it appeases some people. That seems good, but it becomes apparent that this change also annoys others. This can lead to the list of acceptable words changing once again. Changing once, then again, ad infinitum. Do not believe that you are using the right set of words now. It is never long before someone will find fault with how you say things. Things acceptable today will not be acceptable in years to come. On it goes. Never consistent, rarely rational and infuriatingly over-exacting.

When someone is telling you what you should and should not say, be mindful that it is their opinion and their interpretation. People that use the should word have an agenda, an agenda that might run counter to what you consider to be the best/right thing to do.

The rules of the land take precedence over rules of faith and belief. They are formed collectively by all those living in the nation now, building on what those that lived there in the past contributed. Laws common to all take the top spot in the hierarchy of what we should or should not do.

The heart of discrimination lies with debarring. Denying entry. Refusing to serve someone because of their perceived type; creed, colour, ethnicity for example. Your choice of language to describe or name someone doesn't automatically debar, deny or alter their opportunities. We can insult people with a slur. We can hurt people with our use of words whether intentionally or not. We may direct such words towards particular people because of certain characteristics that they have. We single them out. This can make them feel isolated, but this differs from debarring. We debar when we reject someone applying for a job or prevent entry to a building. Not including, not welcoming - hostility is debarring. Our use of words to describe people may be the first step towards debarring, but not always.

Evangelism

Evangelism is the spreading of ideas, often forcefully, on others regarding what people should and should not do. Your first encounter with evangelism will be at home. Your parents will encourage you to behave in a certain way. They will encourage certain behaviours and squash others. They will tell you what you should be doing and when. When we begin school, we have a whole new set of new rules imposed upon us. More things that we are supposed to do and more things we should not do. If we attend a church the level of should and should not is ramped up even further. There are plenty of people that want to let us know what we should be doing. What, how, when and with a hazy why.

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.

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? Why must I do it that way? 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.

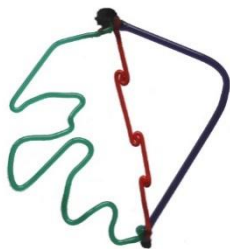
There are plenty who think of themselves akin to football managers. The experience garnered over the years gives them the justification to govern players on the pitch. A football manager and the players will at least be sharing the same aim, that of winning the match. In other walks of life, we want 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 may discover a new way of doing something. We may devise a better strategy. We may find a new recipe, a faster way to stitch or an easier way to repair something. Should we keep that knowledge to ourselves, or do we tell others about it? Spreading knowledge to help others can be most welcome. Spreading know-how is one thing, spreading moral messages may not be quite so welcome. How far, how wide do we want to spread our knowledge, beliefs and ethical codes? We could publish details and any that stumble across it can read what we have to say. We could promote it a little to get more to take notice. Given that we believe that what we have to say has some merit we might promote our contribution extensively. The promotion reaches a point where we can be labelled an evangelist. An evangelist wants to change your opinion and harass those that won't take notice of their opinion. What you see as opinion they see as fact.

If

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 tell those about to make this journey that the red route is the shortest and **if** they have time on their hands there is 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. Perhaps 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 certain things may be foolish. We go against their 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. Some may copy us. Some may choose to ignore how we do things. It takes a lot of restraint to not say something when we see someone doing something that is obviously dangerous, inefficient or stupid. Nevertheless, 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.

Opinion

Opinions are derived from preferences. You may prefer to go it alone. Others want us to support one another as a group. You may prefer to share when it suits you to share rather than be forced to share. That is a fundamental difference in preference. That difference in preference leads to a difference in opinion about how a society should operate. Some want us to share all

we have with the rest of society. Others do not want to be forced into sharing with all; their family is their priority.

Different strategy, different outcome. We can show why each strategy works better than others. We have reliable proven methodology. Some strategies are more efficient than others. Some strategies win more and win more often. However, the outcome we each want may differ and so opinions will differ as to what strategy we ought to employ. Group strategies strangle the individual. People wanting to deploy an alternative strategy will describe the group as sheep, all following the herd. Herd mentality may prevail, but sheep do not bunch together very often. They scatter across the fields, grazing where they feel like grazing. They only bunch together when corralled.

People huddle together and work as a gang. They may use the safety in numbers principle. As the huddling commences some will make a dash for it. Those that make a dash for it and run from the group will feel like the odd ones out. They are not complicit. The complicit ones 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.

Does water boil at 100 degrees Celsius. Maybe. The boiling point maybe just 70 degrees when high up a mountain as the altitude affects the boiling point. This can catch many out that assume that boiling water will make it safe to drink. Not all germs will be killed at 70 degrees. 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. You should never waste food say some. Fair point? Under that logic not finishing your meal is wasting food, but what if you leave some to avoid over-eating and getting fat?

If you are to take one thing from this chapter, remember the word opinion. People make opinion seem like fact. It may not be. Deep-seated opinion destroys relationships. Deep-seated opinion divides us. What is best – best for who. Hence, deciding what we should do, depends on who and what we care about the most.

Philosophy is everywhere

Philosophy has a poor image; people arguing inane senseless trite. Philosophers use sophisticated language. Very few conclusions are 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. Aims are set out coupled with principles and rules. The spirit of the rules is instilled into those taking part. The philosophy of the organisation sets out the

purpose, the point, the goal and the objectives. The philosophy describes how the sport, club or business will conduct itself and how it will be run. The philosophy will decide how it is enjoyed.

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. Questioning things leads to new dynamics, new ways and allow more light into our lives. 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. 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?

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.

What is the difference between a 22-week-old foetus and a 21-week-old one? On the one hand, not much. On the other hand, a small difference makes a world of difference. What is the difference between a happy spaceship launch and a fireball? One tiny part not working properly. One part failing due to the temperature. All critical parts need to be functioning correctly to avoid a catastrophic fireball. If the skin of a rocket is too thin, it fails. If the skin of a foetus is too thin a baby never materialises. All of the ball must go over all of the line. Using technology to precisely measure the position of the ball, we can disallow a goal for the ball not being a hairs width over all of the line. It is not a goal despite being in the goal mouth and so close to counting. One small part in your body can fail at any moment rendering your viability invalid. Life is an elegant fragile thing.

We might declare a fertilised egg to be a human being. We can also declare one grain of rice and two peas as a rice and peas meal. We can state that an acorn is an oak tree. We can say that a week-old embryo is a human in the making, but it doesn't function as a human being. One grain of rice and two peas is insufficient to be classed as a meal. Opinion divides people. The right to live free from interference and abort before a murder is committed, vs a belief that human life begins at conception and is not to be terminated at will. There is no right answer, just opinion in matters such as these.

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.

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 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

Too much, too little. Too fast, too slow. Too expensive, too cheap. Too risky, too safe. Too noisy, too quiet. A happy medium perhaps. Can you find the balance that suits you? Can you stick to it? It is not easy as plenty of your friends and family will encourage you to do more, do less, or do whatever that suits their balance rather than yours. Confidence: finding the balance that works for you and holding firm. Balance and moderation are found in so much of what we do. Getting a balanced diet. Getting enough exercise. Drinking some wine, but not so much that you lose the following day to aches, tiredness and regret. Eating the right things to maintain your body. Not eating too much - with temptations all around you. Eating too little can be equally bad for your life expectancy.

How much exercise ought we do each day? It is difficult to say for sure. Any is better than none I would assume. Exercising in moderation is better than doing too much. I ignore the warnings of those that disparage me for doing too little for whilst they exercise quite a lot more than me, they complain of bad knees, bad backs, bad tendons, and bad tempers, and struggle to get a good night's sleep. They are the ones with ligaments that one never knew existed constantly flaring up.

Moderation can seem plodding to the young and eager. However, there is a bravery in balance that gets overlooked. People persuade us to do more. Others try to slow us down. Most find a balance that suits them personally. Maturity lends itself towards moderation. We are not the same. Our level of endurance differs. What can be a lot for some is not always a big deal to you. The amount of pain we can tolerate is different. Hence trying 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.

Strong language gets people's attention, but an attention-grabbing headline loses its effect if overdone. If you declare someone to be twisted for giving some badly worded advice, what word do you have left in your armoury for someone who revengefully poisoned your pet?

Moderation does allow for some vices. A little wayward behaviour from time to time is moderation with compromises.

Some worry too much, some not enough about the plethora of issues around us. Stoical is fine at times, but action changes things – usually for the better.

Tolerance

Some people are a great help, others are a wretched nuisance. How much nuisance are we prepared to tolerate before we say something or do something to combat it? How tolerant should we be? If someone is making a lot of noise it can test our tolerance. Opinions will differ. How much noise and how often is key. Once a year – someone celebrating a birthday or anniversary. Most will find that tolerable and acceptable. However far less of us will tolerate noise that disturbs us daily, particularly when it is for hours on end. Dogs barking. Music thumping. Shouting and screaming. This is the tolerance problem. All people can be a nuisance including you. How much lenience are your neighbours giving you. Are they being tolerant of you but you not of them? Are we looking at the situation from our point of view only? Find your own balance. Find your own level of tolerance. Be careful of those use you to fight their battles in the tolerance games.

The more tolerant we are of recklessness; the more people are hurt. Those not involved in the activity are the ones society might want to protect the most. The ones that are involved in the activity may call upon help from others when things go wrong. If a society is set up to help those in trouble, then those in that society may feel the need to be mindful of what they are doing. Walking in the wilds, ill equipped may lead to a search and rescue. That rescue will consume resources and put the rescuers in danger too. However, people from all walks of life will make mistakes. All of us make mistakes.

We can be tolerant of other people's way of life, their religion and political beliefs. However, many of us fall into the trap of being tolerant of other people's intolerance.

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. However, not all of us are happy to see non-conformity. We do not tolerate deviation from societal norms; an intolerance of people deciding for themselves.

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 like this in different ways. 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. Nevertheless, maybe the basic premise remains, most try to avoid infringing too much on others. Most avoid upsetting others needlessly. Most take care not to endanger the lives of others.

Life is a game

Life is a game, an unfair game, 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 by 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 choices that differentiate us. Choices that separate the brave from the stupid, the astute from the acquiescent.

Life can go by in a frustrating blur, so choose your 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 that your life will come to an end but that doesn't put you off playing. Not at all. We don't dwell on it too much. The end can

come abruptly when you get taken out and replaced. You are substituted but your loss is someone else's gain. Someone else takes your place and happily for them, gets to prove their worth.

What is a successful result you may ask. What counts as a victory? Teams compete with one another in international sporting events. The completion is fierce hence those awarded a gold medal seemed quite pleased with themselves. The ones that got silver were not pleased. 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 they come. To some, second place is success, to others, managing third is a miracle to be truly celebrated. They smile about it for years on end and get others to marvel at the fantastic third-place trophy on their shelf. Some have been 7-0 down in a football match and didn't give up. They were chuffed to see the final scoreboard show 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 caught out. 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 the 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.

If you are struggling to achieve a certain meaningful goal, have a go at visualising what you want. The visualisation goal-getting-technique works best with a visual reminder. Place a picture of what you want on the wall in your bedroom. It will remind you every time you wake up. You see clearly what you want. You think about it all the time. The more you think about it, the more you find the impetus to do something positive towards that goal. The visual reminder stops us procrastinating. It stops us finding excuses for failure. It helps us strive to overcome a hurdle. It can work. Sometimes - so long as what you want is realistically achievable.

Time 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 our future today regardless of how long we live. Whilst the end of the game comes 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 might 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. You might not. You might exist for years with discomfort. Ever more confused. Ever more drained. Ever more hapless. Few want to live forever like that. Living forever is infinitely more appealing if we remain in good health.

There are simple things we can do that aid the probability of staying healthy. These simple measures do not absorb much of our time. However, some devote vast amounts of their time and money on things they believe will give them a chance of living much longer than average. Is a life a bit misdirected if one does that? Is the winner the one who lasts the longest? What is more important to you, quantity or quality. It is glib to mock these people whilst we use up lots of our time on semi-absurd things; Maintaining the best body, building the best house in the street which you then sell to someone else to enjoy, gambling, painting tin soldiers, writing books that few will bother to read.

Some don't think of this game of life as being something with a start, middle and end, but one where it continues forever in a different dimension. You may believe you will live forever in an afterlife of sorts or believe that you will create a legacy that lives on long after you are gone, but there is just this game of life, nothing more. No returning to play again. No other board to play on after and your legacy is a mirage. I hope that helps. I hope that makes you look at the estimated time you have left in a positive way. Living forever here on earth might not be a golden dream anyway. 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 be so handily unseated by their inherent perishability.

There you are sat in the front row seat, inside a large auditorium. A dapper man stands before you. He makes an enthusiastic motivational speech. You become enchanted by this speaker and what he has to say. The speech rouses the audience with tales of his success and the bounty it has brought him. All you need do is make some changes, big changes to how you live your life. However, he pays 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. Success requires sacrifice.

Most of us in the game of life will be spectators. It is numerically impossible for it 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.

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 look upon with awe.

Validity

It is not uncommon for people to feel worthless. That is because some feel they are worth less than others. We are all worthy in our own way. There will be those that are wealthier than you. Some will be more popular. Others a lot more well-known. Many will have a job that seems more important job than yours.

However, we are all equally valid. We each have validity, validity in the sense that one gets when holding a valid train ticket. That ticket 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 your feel.

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, the incident/accident wouldn't have happened. A cyclist encountered this reasoning when he 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, he got punched and kicked. 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. We will expose a cheat in a game of fun and shout more loudly if there is money and prestige involved. We want cheats 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.

Those subjected to an irreversible loss feel rage, hurt and grief. Some can come to terms with it and move on after a while. There is a counter play: living a forgiving life. However, this doesn't always provide the required catharsis. Not all can't get over it and

they want 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. There is a fear of further reprisals. People that take a dim view of those that take revenge on a criminal get even more upset if total innocents get hurt in the process.

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

End of days

Our priorities can change in our twilight years. 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. 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 pierce 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. Our lifespan is restricted, we can do nothing but accept the boundary and enjoy our turn.

Your existence affects the world for sure, no matter what you do. You may may make a positive contribution to humankind. Much of that positive contribution you won't get to see. Many people never got to see the result application of their work. That is the way it is. You will have been greatly helped by contributions made by people in the past. Lots of things have made life better. Hot water on tap. Heating food with microwave energy. Simple cheap lighting to read and work by instead of calling it quits each day when the sun goes down or spending an age making candles. The list goes on. Life is a game played on a board that has already been devised and setup ready for you to play. You add something, often positive, regularly negative too. You can do your bit. Something positive for humankind. Note. You will see it as a positive. It will be positive for humankind, but just humankind not other kinds.

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. People 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 go 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 physical issue is one thing, but it is pathetic to even consider it, just to avoid facing difficult circumstances. Don't kill yourself because of debt. You can make yourself bankrupt and start afresh. When you are in a better financial position after bankruptcy, you may be able to gradually pay a little back to those you owed. Don't kill yourself because you feel trapped. Escape is always possible. When you fall out or foul up there is always a way to figure out a solution.

Apologise, make amends, reorganise, restructure. Use your curiosity to find a way forward.

So, what choices do we have when we reach rock bottom, when we are at the lowest point in our life, and everything is a major struggle? Option silly, kill yourself. Option two, see your situation as an opportunity. Death or chance to pack your 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.

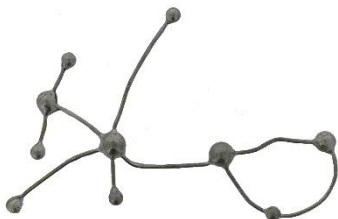
I said, 'just to avoid' facing difficult circumstances, at the time it feels more than 'just a difficult period'. We may feel totally heartbroken. We might not be able to see a way forward right now. In time you will. People do. Those that slog onwards have come out the other side, relieved that they 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. The things that we were ashamed of are turned into a badge of honour of sorts. We admit our mistakes. We acknowledge where we went wrong. We know that we also did a lot right. If needed, we show contrition. We make amends if possible.

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 charity 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. Lots of choices. What to eat. When to go to bed. Who to vote for. Now you can choose whether to skip this chapter or even bin the whole book. Does it matter how we go about choosing? Not really, but it gives us 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 have experience and knowledge to make rational choices. However, the way we operate is not terribly complicated at all. We create pathways in our mind, simple ones that we follow over and over. When we analyse what goes on inside our heads, we can see how we arrive at a decision, we can see how we prioritise, and we can understand choice. Much of what we do starts with a seed, an idea, a piece of information. We then link more and more to that seed. These bunches of links, fretworks, dictate what we do, what we choose, and how we prioritise.

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. Someone has mentioned skiing, and they have made the idea of going skiing sound appealing to you. That starts a sequence of events. You need to look at where you could go. How much money it would cost. What is the likelihood of breaking several bones and is there snobbery involved. Inside your head you place a seed: the desirable skiing trip. You add information to that seed as you go along. You look for the best ski resort within your budget. You work out when you can get time off work and investigate 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 and you ponder

about the trip you planned. Any sight of snow and you ponder about the trip you planned. The seed lingers. Lots of seeds linger, some get bigger, others fade. We add links. We move links. We change links. We alter the arrangement of links in our head. What I am saying is that your life is not much more than building and organising a bunch of links.

Prioritise

Fretworks can become large and complex, but they operate using simple biomechanical processes. Our reasoning can be full of nuance and cleverness. Other choices are straightforward, we do something to satisfy basic needs. Either way, it is links and fretworks in action. A choice is a choice no matter how serious or whimsical. Fretworks operate in the same manner regardless of the consequences.

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. I drew a map, putting all the items on one by one. This created a visual representation of the simple links. Get bread, milk, soup. Return a parcel. Whilst in town, 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.

I added things to those links. What problems were solved by going shopping and the problems that exist if these items are not here in my house. I can't make nice coffee without milk. People are coming to visit tomorrow. They will want a cup of coffee. There is a deadline for returning the parcel else no refund. You can imagine for yourself the possibilities in your day-to-day life. As you add these extra links relating to what you can and can't do without the items the fretwork gets bigger and bigger. The bigger the fretwork the more it is prioritised. When you include all the consequences, a full map gets quite big. One thing may prevent you from doing another. No milk means no drinks for our guests and no bowl of cereal for the kids either. The more links we establish the more we feel the need to go shopping.

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. It costs a bit more but never mind. I'll drop the parcel on the way. You broke the fretwork down thereby changing your priority. The hospital visit has become the new priority. It now has the bigger fretwork.

The process of deciding what to do works in the same way as priorities. We build fretworks consisting of pros and cons. Should

we, should we not. What do we gain and what do we stand to lose. We can leave decisions for a while as we gather information but when time runs out, we are forced to come to a decision. What do we do then? What we do is approximate the relative size of the competing fretworks. The bigger one wins the day. The largest one always gets the go ahead.

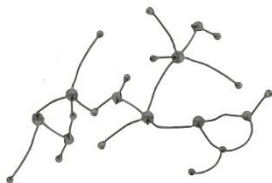
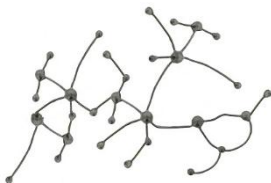
The largest fretwork will have information surrounding the seed and a variety of hooks that link into prearranged bunches of links; what we describe as experience. You need to go shopping else you go hungry. Hunger dwells in your head. Memories of being hungry - being hungry in the past left a mark. If your food cupboard is bare, getting the soup to eat later will link into hunger memory fretworks. If there is a grim alternative to soup, you will have fretworks relating to eating a vile tin of pilchards. Do I want to go out and get some nice soup or stay in this afternoon and eat vile pilchards tonight?

Simple questions. Simple sets of interlinking fretworks. Simple method of deciding. We choose the largest most prominent fretwork. A decision has nothing to do with the factors per se, but the number of factors and the space those factors each occupy. The factors relate to the real world. Indeed, they do. However, the factors are representations of the real world. A choice will have real world consequences, but a choice is based on how fretworks are formed in your head. You think something is important, so have a big bunch of neurons set up in relation to it.

Sounds, smells, sensations are all transcribed into fretworks. The things we see are transcribed too. All our experiences and memories are transcribed into fretworks. Those musical notes that you have stored can be fed into your hearing system to make you hear a song. Those links that form a picture can be fed into your seeing system to allow you to see it without your eyes. These fretworks are sometimes linked to decision seeds. They enable us to build competing networks. The competition is to gain priority and to encourage us to decide things.

The clues are all in the language we use. We say, on balance that was the best thing to do, or the advantages outweighed the disadvantages. The more we care, the more information we will seek out. The more information we analyse the greater the confidence we will have in our decision. Lots of information leads to lots of deliberating, often for many weeks before a conclusion is reached. When all the analysis is done, all we need do is make a quick assertion of which group of neural links is the largest. It is worth noting that when we later get new information, namely the full story - more related links, we may 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. We rule things out. We thereby discount something which reduces the size of one of the competing fretworks.



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 decision system in our heads. The only difference in the information you use and the external effect a decision will have.

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.

Choosing what to do can be delayed when we have a circular path. Links can go in circles and therefore thoughts go in circles and a decision is not possible. There are no distinct set of fretworks hence you can't then measure the size of each group. We end up in a land of limbo, doing very little until this is sorted.

Free will is and always will be free. We have the ability to exercise free will randomly, consistently, predictably and/or thoughtfully. That is always true, however freewill is steered by our past far more than the present. Things: ideas, habits, beliefs, hopes, desires, experiences and so on become rooted in our mind. A decision is based on those roots. A decision may seem like something we do in the present but what we choose stems from thought processes during the days, weeks, and years prior. What

happened in the past has a huge bearing on decisions we make. What we do today, what we think today, what we experience today will affect our decisions in the future. 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. To simplify the understanding of free will, ask yourself if you can choose to get in a car and drive somewhere? Can you drive somewhere without knowing how to open the car door? Can you get to where you would like to go without being able to drive competently? Free will is interconnected with skills and knowledge.

Criminal acts

Criminals often inculcate their children with criminal behaviour setting up vastly different sets of fretworks than law abiding decent families. Our destinies are cast to some extent. Freewill is based on the fretworks set up in our heads. We can off course rearrange the fretworks. Something might spark a desire in us to live a more virtuous life than our dreadful parents. Or we can learn from our parent's mistakes and generate a belief that we will not be so stupid as them and won't get caught. Fretworks expand through exposure to the world around us. Lots will become involved with small misdemeanours before embarking on much bigger ones. Criminals form habits, they may steal from shops regularly. Some move on from relatively minor crimes and find themselves propelled towards armed robbery. In theory freewill allows for someone to shift from a law-abiding decent citizen to a gold bullion vault plunderer overnight. However, the fretworks pertaining to robbery are not in place, so this is improbable. At the very least they would need to generate a seed and build on it for a good while before they went out and did such a sordid deed. Freewill is governed by the creation and organisation of fretworks in the mind. Creating and organising fretworks takes time, days, week, months, sometimes years.

Rich people 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. Alternatively, we build justifications for our unlawful ways. Justification fretworks that lead us to develop habits which aid our decisions.

We can choose to change. At any time, 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 opportunities as their fretwork contains so much knowledge relating to these acts. Gardeners notice 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 an 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. Fretworks are built in relation to that.

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 of the ultimate reasons. A small thing can alter the size of competing sets of decision fretworks. This makes us believe that we can exercise freewill so readily. The straw that broke the camels back. The camel needs to be loaded close to the brink for that straw to break its back. A criminal is a loaded camel.

Our minds can be chemically interfered with. What punishment do we hand out to someone that consumed alcohol voluntarily compared with someone that unwittingly inhaled an industrial substance? The actions of the two might be quite similar, but the intention quite different. Someone with physical damage to the mind may act in a violent way. There is no freewill intention in this case, as the fretworks were physically disturbed. Sober people can act very dangerously. Some want to show off, and they need no dis-inhibitor 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. Those accustomed to violence will use aggression with less forethought. Some see red and begin lashing out, acting wholeheartedly animalistic. People react automatically with little thought and little inhibition. They will have acted this way 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.

Seeing red. An aggressive heated state we can get into. Ideally, we would find a way to release the build up without being violent towards others. In practice, many find that very challenging once a certain threshold has been passed. New habits can address the problems relating to seeing red.

Seeing black. A sexually heated state we can get into. The flood of chemicals and emotional hyper frisson destroys patience. Where one can generally perform a sexual act calmly and in harmony with another, seeing black blots out everything bar what one wants. The will to wait is tested, often beyond someone's limits. Imagine going days without food then smelling a fine plate of food. Seeing it, salivating, and being asked to wait ten minutes before touching it. That only goes a little way towards getting the gist of it. An amplified sexual desire wants to be sated immediately. Rational thinking is temporally overridden. Those that understand free will understand the effect of biological chemistry. They appreciate how powerful chemistry can unbalance carefully crafted networks, quashing their usefulness. We know what state we can get into. We know what is likely to cause it, and what helps and what does not.

The gravest error one can make is to stick to a belief that things ought to be so. They are not. Humans are stimulated. That stimulation can be such that they act in a way that differs not from the way a mosquito detects a target, pounces and then pushes its trumpet through the skin to draw blood.

We might appear to be roving complex animals with determination and individual freedom to do what we want. Yet more often than not, we are driven by routine and habits. We can of course change our mind whenever we want. We can alter our plans on the spot. Then alter them again moments later for reasons that appear hard to fathom. However, seemingly random behaviour would have been evident in the past. 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. Your attitude stems from a long learning journey.

There are many ways to break certain habits. We can wean ourselves off something. We can stop, full stop. We can replace one habit with another. Reward is powerful. Reward addiction, in whatever form that takes, is best dealt with via a weaning off process. A gradual reduction. A bit-by-bit reduction is less difficult than a full stop. When the process is complete, the habit will be dealt with permanently whereas the full stop method is prone to relapses. Identify each time, place or trigger and choose one in

turn to forgo. Stick to it until it is embedded then move to the next.

That will do

We make lots of quick decisions each day. Selecting which cup to use to make our tea perhaps of which plate to put our food on. With a stack of plates to choose from the decision is not complex. We pick the top one. A plate is a plate. A plate is what we need. This plate will be fine, that will do. If we notice some dirt on it, we might swap it for another one. Subconsciously we say, that will do. These decisions are practised and become automatic. We are automats doing things, often with little conscious thought. Some thought may be required to seize the optimum spot to sit. Some like to have their back to the wall and no one wants to be at the end of a long table full of diners. One in from the end is much better. Sometimes we compromise, accept a trade off or seize the least-worst 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. If you map the fretwork, you will see that the biggest one triumphed.

Imagine what the world would be like if the time and diligence spent making decisions were correlated to the impact. We can spend a minute deciding what pizza to have. What size, what toppings and which crust option do I want? A house can cost ten thousand times as much as a pizza. However, spending ten thousand minutes thinking about a house purchase is unrealistic.

If I had more money to call upon, I would have made the same decision when it came to the many trades I made. More money deployed on a trade would have led to much more profit. Same amount of time researching. Same amount of time deliberating. Same mechanism used in my head. Vastly more profit.

Wars break out. Leaders make decisions. Once again, the fretwork mechanism in their heads is used to decide what to do. Fretworks are built and adjusted then measured to produce a decision. The consequences of a decision in war are infinitely greater of course than deciding whether to buy a house or not. Leaders will commit troops to battle aware of the potential for huge losses on both sides. Nevertheless, war, trading, and board games that we play with our friends, all require decisions, decisions that use the same fretwork system.

Time pressures force us to cut corners in our decision-making process. We can do nothing right now but there can be consequences with inaction. Unfolding events spur us to make an assessment based on the information we have. Much is presumed

or guessed. Get our assessments wrong and tragedy may strike. Lots of people may die as a result. The consequences of a decision 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 that choices are made by ludicrously simple processes.

The mind can be logical but rash. Your mind gets carried away, making one rash choice after another. Your mind sees pieces as dispensable when the mind wants to resolve the mess - the mess in the mind. Clear up the mess in the battlefield and a corresponding mess in your head is cleared too. To clear the mess in your head, pieces on the battlefield need to be moved.

Having more choice available is wonderful. Once upon a time we had two choices with bread, white or brown. Now we can choose from forty-four different types of bread. That means we get to spend longer deciding which to buy. We find ourselves weighing up the pros and cons. Price, value, texture, taste, health factors, image, and a myriad of other innuendoes. Subtle differences, silly gimmicks work. They hook into our pre-existing fretworks – people on a budget, people looking to eat more healthily, etc.

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. Firstly, 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.

Doing the same as others

Why fight when you can trick someone instead. One dog wants the bone that 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. Mankind creates objects of desire. We revere people. We are lured into group mentality. Walking alone is hard. Walking with others makes us feel that we are doing the right thing. You mother and father, your sister and your brother gave you a sense of place. Lots of fretworks relate

to your early years. Joining a club give you a place too. Fretworks formed in those early years are lonely and feel less lonely if hooked to something new.

The choices we make are numerous. The possibilities are endless. We may never know what would have happened if a different choice was made. We could have done things differently, chose differently, but would that have led to something worse? However, were we too gullible. Did we emulate others for the right reason. Does greater confidence in our choices always help? Usually, yes, sometimes no.

We learn how to do things by watching others. We learn a language by listening and repeating what others are saying. We copy so closely that we obtain the same local accent. We make progress through copying. Copying can constrain us though. Sometimes we copy a little and adapt what we see others do. At other times we take a very different route. Taking a different route, acting differently to what the majority are doing requires self-assurance. Some are sufficiently single-minded to be the master of their own destiny. One 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 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 them 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. Although changes in circumstances lead to many great friendships withering, our choices about what we put first underscores what we believe to be important in life.

I lost more at the poker table than I won, but I learnt a lot. And what I learnt was well worth the relatively small amount of money spent at the table. Poker teaches us about belief and having courage in our convictions. We learn to make a calculation and

act on that rather than let fear take over. I would often have an inkling of what hands I was up against, but it takes nerve to act upon your calculations. Gaining more faith, more self-assurance, believing in what I had reasoned led to winning a lot more hands and ultimately winning a few tournaments. Experience builds finely crafted fretworks. We will experience this; believing someone has a particular hand but not believing it enough to place a bet on it. The cards get turned over and our belief was proved correct. Some of us say it was obvious in hindsight. Re-writing history is common in the common man. If it was that obvious you would have bet on it.

Lots of things are obvious – obvious after we are shown that is. Do we give credit to those that pointed out the obvious? Sometimes, sometimes not. People help us fully understand what we only partially understood. 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.

A choice can be made based on logic. Rational reasoning. Many a choice however throws logic and reasoning aside. Sentimentality. Fretworks associated with sentimentality are very strong and hard to detach. Arguing with someone who is devoted to their sentimental reasoning is difficult.

Many will gladly use the resources available to save one person today rather than use those same resources to save three in the coming months. The person in peril is there in front of us crying for help. We help them and take a “c’est la vie” attitude towards those that perish later. Why is this? In part because of the ease in which we can make an argument. Saving one person now is simple. It is easy to explain. We need not explore all the longer-term consequences. To explain the consequences of using limited resources on one person now takes a lot of time and effort. We need to make people believe that resources are indeed limited. We need to prove that those resources will save more in the future, more than just this one person now. Lots of fretworks have to be shifted. Lots of obfuscatory debate will muddle the save-three-next-month side of the argument.

The sentimental bones in our body are pre-linked to vast fretworks that have kept us in good stead. Logical rational decisions require painful analysis. Lots of effort. Lots of detailed research. Lots of time, weighing up the trade-offs. Sentimental decisions are quick and easy. One can’t be logical at all times

though, as sentimentality is beneficial in our selection process. Dating someone that we find attractive works better than dating someone that in theory offers more. Saving the most lives possible would be a 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 a statistic.

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 people a reality check. A manipulator. The cleverest of them all are those that can get someone to act in a seemingly rational way by using sentimental emotional persuasion. They can shake fretworks in your head so that they shift into place making you choose what suits them.

Parallels

Arachnophobia and acrophobia have many parallels. The fear of coming to harm resides in both. The fear can be rational. Some spiders can harm us. Most are entirely harmless though. We can fall from a height, yet in many situations we may be entirely safe despite our height off the ground. The cure is the same for both. Gradual exposure expunges the fear so long as we have the knowledge to recognise a dangerous spider from a harmless one and we recognise when a ladder or building is safe or not. The message is clear; find the parallel when you struggle finding a cure. The cure for the parallel will be very similar.

Two parallel horizontal lines depict the character, =, equality. We understand equality, treating all with the same respect, giving all the same rights, giving all the same freedoms. Whilst most of us understand the concept, only a tiny number of people in this world want to give everyone the same freedoms, respect and rights. That has been so for quite some time, and it will continue forever that way. Men and women face different problems. The problems men face can have a parallel with the problems women face. The biggest difference in this parallel is the difference in how we deal with the problems men/women face. We don't acknowledge the parallels. Many choose to ignore the problems that the other sex encounters. If you have a gender-based problem, do you care about the parallel problems that the other gender contends with? Those that do care about parallel problems will gain more sympathy for their issues. Gender wars give way to gender harmony when parallels are recognised.

Hypocrisy. Do as I say, not as I do. Many of us are most hypocritical. We can be directly hypocritical and hypocritical in a parallel manner. Someone I knew often scolded their child for showing off, boasting and talking too loudly. That someone was quite well known for owning fancy cars, wearing fancy attire and having fancy ways. She showed off in a different way, a parallel way. When you feel inclined to admonish others for how they behave do you look inwards and examine your parallel ill behaviours?

There is diversity within humans, yet within diverse activities, beliefs and objectives one can see parallels. If there are parallels between our beliefs and the beliefs of others, can we respect what others believe? A lot of what we do feels different to what others are doing. However, it is quite often the same but different. The same basic principles but dressed up differently.

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.

We go through life making lots of changes based on preferences. From what we eat, to what we do 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. It seems like preferences evolve and change over time. The idea of fixed preferences rankles with our perceptions of how things change in our life. We say we prefer this now, to that, yet preferences are fixed. We believe that our preferences change. We can point to many examples. However, one must consider discovery. One must consider negative associations that set in. One must also consider what has changed given that our preferences are indeed fixed.

Discovery

There are many things we try the once and avoid thereafter. There are things we find revolting. Many will say that olives have an unpleasant taste. They have a strong taste for sure. The taste can be a shock and surprise and not at all like grapes. Yet lots of people acquire a taste for olives and overcome 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 though, no matter how hard they try to overcome the initial rejection. 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 how we can overcome initial rejection. You go ice skating. You fall over a few times. 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 by 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

We love something, we are passionate about it, we devote a lot of time and energy towards it then slowly but surely the interest drops off. Something changes. Something irks. Something alters our perspective. This thing no longer resides as the top of our preferred list of things to do or be involved with. 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.

I haven't had a chocolate fondue cake for some time we muse. Maybe they don't make them where we now live. However, today we have a chance to have some. When we bite into it we are surprised that it isn't how we remembered it to be. Maybe more pleasant maybe less so. Is the recipe the same as it was before? Olives tend to be fairly consistent over time, unless some mad botanist meddles with their makeup to alter yield or shelf-life. 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 desire to eat certain

chocolate may dissipate. You preferred products of the past rather than the concoctions of the present. Alternatively, we may find ourselves preferring the new over the old.

A large drinks manufacturer dropped the formula that had been used for decades in favour of a new improved variety. This new formula came out ahead in every focus group. People said it tasted better. However, the core customer base was rather upset. They didn't welcome the change. They much preferred the old formula, not this new one. People began to stockpile hundreds of cans of the old formula, traveling from town to town in search of any still on sale. Sales of the drink with this new formula shrivelled. The result? 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. If you change the taste of something, it is not people's preference that changes.

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.

Members of your family are throwing up in the toilet. They are groaning. They are ill for sure but are exaggerating how bad. They try to elicit some sympathy. Rather than expressing sympathy you drink some fresh orange juice, gleefully believing it will ward off the nasty cold that the others have. Sometime later you begin throwing up too, re-tasting the orange juice drank shortly beforehand. From that day forth, the sight of orange juice brings back memories of that emetic experience. You drank it happily, readily before but now you declare that you would prefer something else to drink instead. You create an association between orange juice and vomiting in your head.

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 some orange juice 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 your former state. Your preference for orange juice over other drinks never went away. It was masked instead by the negative association you had with it.

Bad associations put a blanket over our preferences. 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 cases, we either exist with the phobia or dismantle the connections in our mind that derail our preferences.

Associations can help us stay safe, but they can stop us from enjoying the super and sublimely great.

There is an art to seduction, much less a science. We can seduce people to go on a date with us. We can seduce people to buy things. We can seduce people to override their inner preferences. Your fixed preferences will rarely align well with your friend's preferences. 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 our preferences given to us at birth. 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, say some. If you are a midget, two-foot-tall, you are extremely unlikely to beat the world high jump record. Not just unlikely, it is most improbable. Someone could try as hard as they can for years on end to beat records set down by other people. Despite the best training, the best running shoes and with the finest diet coupled with the most perseverance imaginable, they still fail. Most will not even come close. Your body has defined limitations. No matter how hard you push your body, it has a limit to what it can achieve.

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 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 ignoring the risk of a premature death.

Finding our limits requires resolve and perseverance. It is made harder by the fact that each increment of improvement gets ever smaller as we get closer to our limits. We get to a point where despite a massive amount of extra effort, only a small improvement is seen.

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, inadvertently or otherwise, 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. Preferences sit at your core. They are deep within you. They are infused deeply. To access them you need your sensory inputs. You need the physicality of your body to dovetail with the preferences inside you.

You are degrading daily. The more you degrade, the harder it is to explore things that are true to you. Being true to yourself is living the life you prefer, but that gets more difficult when you can no longer do what you could in the past.

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 can do something that contradicts your preferences because of convenience, to follow fashion or to satisfy another objective. It is harder to do something in keeping with our preferences if something else is on offer that doesn't require travelling so far or

is cheaper or because certain people make less preferable activities jolly fun. Ideally you would prefer it if you could join other fine people who share your joys and practice them 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, the warmth from 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. Certain scents will evoke passion and joy. Particular stories chime with you. Certain people slot in with your way of thinking. Lots of things register with those inbuilt preferences that were allotted to you at conception. Some keys will coincide with your locks. From that simple core it becomes a mush. Memories, experiences, exceptions, the weather, and who you are with. Lots of variables come 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, deep inside you with lots stacked above making it 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

In the survival game, protection is the number one priority, followed by shelter, water, and food. Prioritising food and drink may seem sensible until a marauding bear decides to give you a fright or an army of ants begin to dismantle your shelter and leave you with ten thousand itchy bites. We all value protection. Supremely wealthy moguls fear being kidnapped. The homeless fear someone setting fire to their alcoholic breath or beating them up for a perverse few minutes of entertainment. Having somewhere safe to spend the night is high up on everyone's list of important things to sort out. After protection, the second crucial 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 starts with the basics in life. Once they are in place, we consider 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 to others. It makes itself seen by radiating beauty. Flowers are fragile. Unfortunate events can crush our happiness flower. Flowers are all different. A simple life for some. A richly vibrant life for others.



Hours and hours can be whiled away discussing the complex subject of happiness, presumptions are made, myths are banded about. In some corners of the globe, the winters are harsh. The days are short, the nights are long. We might assume that the suicide rate is rather high in these places or that people have a greater degree of depression than those in warmer climes. That is not the case. People live happily there despite the hardship, despite the cold. The weather is a petal, not the whole flower.

Little things can 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. 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, maybe 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 losing their home would 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 spouse/partner. 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 generously to others. They will philanthropise and enjoy giving to others. When our health deteriorates, petals fall off. As each petal falls off, it is one more thing that we can no longer do. Our children can leave the family home and leave a gap in our flower petal arrangement. However, it leaves a gap in which you can now fill with something else. Sometimes. Some gaps are difficult to fill.

You may want to experience fine dining and preen at 'glamorous' events. Whereas others are content with a film to watch, a pie in the oven and a pack of beers in the fridge. 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. Change can be had from going out somewhere just for the sake of it. At the very least it 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, there are 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 do it again and again.

There can be a never-ending search for more and that is usually good. Contentment comes from the search and the seeking and the plotting and the 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 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.

Try idling away an hour or two, just lie back and watch the landscape. Allow yourself time 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. The ratio matters, the ratio of time alone and time with others.

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.

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 though. They vary a lot. 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. People find themselves stuck in the middle, longing for a permanent respite from all their obligations. 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.

Can we make changes in our lives to bring about as much happiness as possible? 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 which raises your life off the floor into the fray. Having a side kick makes an incredible difference. Sometimes a difference that takes too many words to describe. Blooming marvellous bliss, my partner in crime. Mine. One that listens. One that takes an interest in what I am doing. One that joins in. One that helps. One that I can invest in. One that looks me in the eye with acceptance. Solitary flowers can be happy. Some are lonely in a relationship or lonely in love with someone that wants them not. Whatever the case, celibacy is not hereditary. Celibacy may be peaceful, but it is also likely to be dry and sombre.

The thing that holds you back is a powerful invisible spider's web, trapping you, making you anxious and nervous and cautious and unnecessarily afraid. The more times you push through that damn web, the less anxious you will be. What is the worst that can truly happen. Maybe you won't bust your bank account, nor your reputation. Maybe the embarrassment will be less than expected. Maybe you will be seen as more human. Are your intentions good? If so, then push through the web.

Live. Use your legs, your mouth and all the things that still work and be. Be something, be someone. We all count.

Any discourse, discussion, debate, and general interaction with others tends to be very uplifting. No more needs to be said. Talk, listen, talk your way to a better mood and eventually more happiness.

Some say that we ought to identify little joys and make sure they are inserted into our days. The accumulative effect of all these small pleasures can be good. We can be instructed by the wise to be grateful for what we have. That word, grateful, is mentioned frequently in therapy. We can indeed find many a thing to be grateful for. We can still yearn for more though. For that, another word is relevant. Persistence. To get what we yearn for, one must keep trying.

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. These fortunate souls 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 fashionable 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 had, albeit a shorter than expected life, was superb. However, no distraction stops them thinking about what happened and how it 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 a problem free life 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. We revel in finding solutions, making other people's lives easier. When you make other people happier, you feel happier 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 all cases. 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; is this 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 bored of life, semi-depressed but not suicidal? Fed up. Life seems to be going nowhere. Same, same, same. Maybe things are too easy for you. Think of a very hard challenge. Something very difficult, but just about possible. Go do it. Plan, scheme. Find a route, Do it.

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 give them 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. That is just the way it is.

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. Wealth is relative whilst happiness is not, not always.

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 is 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. Reading or playing a game helps time pass. Superb when we are waiting for something, maybe 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 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 choices in regards the finer details. Does she 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. Luckily, I spotted a vending machine nearby. 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? However, I pause and reflect. Earlier I saw a young frog wait patiently in a long queue for an ice cream. It is deemed fair to wait our turn. His ice cream had a cherry on top. The cone broke and it fell to the floor. Tough luck said the ice cream vendor.

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 that irks, it is the principle that annoys me the most. 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. 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 well regardless, 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 handle any hostile 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 wish to act better kept for when you or somebody else's physical wellbeing is seriously 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. However, discrimination will always exist no matter how hard a society tries to do something about it.

Every person on the planet is guilty of giving preferential treatment to those they favour.

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.

Fairness is a human construct that can be programmed into the computer of a self-driving vehicle. 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.

Excuses aplenty

Some people have 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, annoying those that deserve annoying. 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. Alternatively, 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 believe you deserve. The fantasist.

Social capital

Our parents bequeath us a certain amount of social capital. From there it is up to us to utilise it and add to it where possible. 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. There is good reason why we select the most attractive partner available. 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

genetics. It can be boosted by a parent's ability to nurture too. Choosing a healthy, attractive partner is very sensible. It increases your children's likelihood of having a bountiful satisfying life, incredibly so.

We can increase our social capital by 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 accusations of sexual impropriety whether vexatious/frivolous or not. One small misunderstanding can 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.

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 off 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.

Life is unfair for you as a human or a frog. We believe, falsely, that we can tinker with the rules in society, with the taxation, with the social norms to make it fairer for all. We can't make it fairer for all. We can make it fairer for some by being selective. When we are selective, we create something horrible. Frogs can be rather noisy. Noisy frogs disturb the peace. Rather than fine all frogs that make too much noise, we shall punish just the green and purple frogs. If you want to create a fairer world, imprint one word on your forehead. Consistency. Fine all frogs, visiting frogs, big frogs, small frogs, rich frogs, all frogs. Consistent criticisms. Rules can be applied consistently to all frogs with no allowances given to those that believe in different ideologies.

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 ways 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 when people point them out. Embracing what makes us, us works better than getting upset by people mocking us.

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.

Those with an odd name will hear the same joke over and over. Each person that makes the joke, 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 speak very slowly 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 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 often 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 victimising. We have a habit of starting with a bit of a joke and moving towards demonising people. Once is comedy, thrice is torment. 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.

Humour

Have you ever finished someone else's sentence? We predict what people are going to say before they finish their 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 needs 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 must pause to allow them to work out what you might say, then say the unexpected thing. Jokes that you have heard before don't create

much laughter, as you know what is coming next. Good jokes are hard to foresee, they are not predictable. Try some humour in the middle of a serious discussion. People won't be expecting and most certainly won't anticipate it.

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.

Parents often use the tickle reflex mechanism to help bond with their children, even though extensive tickling is known to be torturous. People (adults) were paid handsomely to take part in a tickle torture challenge to see who could endure the most. 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. We can laugh even if we don't find it that funny. Laughing in these situations is 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 rather taxing, a bit of an ordeal, after two or so years things, for the most part, improve dramatically. Your offspring become far more interactive. They begin a transition from being a pain to useful 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.

No parent gets everything right. Some do a lot better than others for sure. Most parents think they are doing things right. In fairness it is difficult to say for sure what is right in every situation. There will always be trade-offs. If we ask what is best, do we ask best for who. It might be better for the child but not better for the family as a whole.

A magnet will not pick up a wine glass, but will pick up iron, nickel, cobalt and gadolinium. Likewise, there are things that work well with children and things that do not. There are easier ways. There are less stressful ways. There are ways in which awkward children can be handled better. You will need to adapt rather than adopt best practices to suit your situation though.

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 to a piece of wood? 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. Those with physical and mental handicaps will always need support however, 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 can 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 an 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.

Life revolves around curiosity, boredom, selfishness and reward. The more someone is left to do things for themselves the more reward they feel and the less boredom they suffer. Waiting on people seems kind but it causes boredom. Your patience enables a child or frail adult to feel rewarded when they succeed.

Have patience with a child that turns their head away whilst talking to you. Many children can't think and look at you at the same time. Their mind is not developed enough to handle those two operations at the same time.

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. Or is a word that causes the headache. Do as you are told, or I will tell your father. Stop please, or you will get a smack from your mother when she gets home. To create boundaries, pay attention to your use of the words or/else.

If your child disobeys your instruction once, they will disobey a second time. They will continue to disobey you. Once is enough for the rot to set in. You ask nicely - and get ignored. So, you resort to shouting but still get ignored. Your patience wears thin, so shouting becomes the norm. As frustration sets in, some feel inclined to hit and smack to get any sense of control. Those that never allow their children to get the upper hand in the first place never shout and most certainly never need to smack a child. They have authority without resorting to physical reprimands. Authoritative but not akin to a military commander. Patience and persistence - never backing down. Teachers that can control the class are liked far more than those that can't. Fashionable new age willy-nilly styles; hapless, hopeless.

Children test you by being obstructive. They have a gadget that you want to use. They refuse to give it to you and make things as awkward as possible by tucking it under their arms. 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. If you give up, they win. From there, they will find untold ways of disobeying your instructions. Things will get progressively worse. Keep asking until they relent and give it to you.

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. By saying, "Do you want it or not?", it 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 once or twice at most 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.

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 by raised voices. 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. Get up close, right in their face, speak in a firm quiet voice - almost a whisper, "No. Do not do that." This method works a charm. 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 see physical discipline as necessary to get children to behave. They want children to be respectful towards their elders. However, millions of us have demonstrated that physical discipline is never needed to keep good control. It is damaging, rather than helpful. The question of when physical punishment becomes 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 violence is the only way to bring people into line. Anyway, are children not 'on your side', are they not a kind of team member rather than punch bags.

There is outrage and upset when news of something nasty happens 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. Fish suck their baby fry into their mouths and spit them back into the nursery area. Once the baby fish learn to be quick enough to avoid getting swallowed, they make their way out to open waters. Copy fish at your peril.

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 calmly ask them to clear it up and get another one. A little sigh maybe but no problem, no anger, no punishment. A child who is trying to help, gets scolded and then frightened to do things. We learn by being a little embarrassed, a bit sorry for our clumsiness. The greater the fear of doing something wrong, the worse things become. Do you want admiration as a parent or do you want your children to resent you because they always fear doing things wrong, being wrong, being different. Let them do it their way even if it different to how you do it. Even if it seems slower. Even if it is not exactly how you would do it. Give them gentle guidance rather than berate them.

One extreme to another

We learn a lot from our parents, too much sometimes. The things that were put on us, we put on our own children. Some things however get translated into opposites. You might have felt too restricted in your youth, so you decide to give your own children a lot freer reign. "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 heaps of vegetables on 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.

Some parents hate to see children play with their food. Yet experts brought in to get kids to eat more variety, begin by getting them to play with food. Let them play. Let them feel food in their hands. Soon after they have it in their mouths.

What happened to you as a child may have been extreme but were you parents right to some degree? Can you temper what your parents did and bring it into balance with your children.

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. Ignore tantrums. Always respond positively to good behaviour. When they play up, turn your head away and wait. Wait until their behaviour becomes acceptable before you re-interact with them. The last step is most important.

You must give them lots of attention when they cool down and behave well.

Pandering to a child in an ill-behaved state makes things worse, worse forever. Many parents will have great difficulty with this aspect of parenting, 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 tantrums disappear in seconds, for they know it won't work.

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 screaming. A child sulk-screaming must not draw your attention. You must, must, must, however, pay them plenty of attention when they calm down. Once calm re-interact. Reward them if you like.

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.

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. One solution to this is to 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. If they keep asking an inane question over and over. Ask them an inane question over and over. If they keep prodding you. Prod them back relentlessly. If they keep asking what the time is. Ask them what the time is over and over for the rest of the day.

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 she returned home from school, she showed her parents her artwork. Each day the artwork was drawn a little bit worse. Each time she showed it to her parents she got the same, "well done" response. The parents weren't taking a blind bit of notice.

Do we need to be frightened of telling children 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 children, all children will reach a ripe old age, but sadly that is far from guaranteed. We can over invest in our children. Financial stress. Emotional stress. A high price. 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.

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 long and hard for something will enjoy the result much more. They will continue with the notion of save and spend into adulthood. Reward felt in your head requires work. Children who work for their pocket money will be happier than those that get given it for doing nothing.

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. Regular tax receipts and predictable payments enables them to plan. 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 keeps you at that coalface. 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 inside. We could persuade a child to value your time more than offerings but swindling them in this way has stopped working. 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. They get much less in the long run.

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 decent.

Us not them

We may wish our children to be a doctor or an accountant or be a 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, 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.

Are you living your own life and or living 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 burden their children with a lot of pressure. Pressure to abide, to do, to act in a certain way. It comes as a shock when all that pressure 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.

Rather than leave our children to sleep in peace until mid-morning we cajole them out of their beds at dawn. We might like them to be like us, get up early and into work but young adults need more sleep than us older folk.

Should we give unfettered access to the wide scope of pornography, violence, incitement, hate and suggestive material that is readily available? Much will be interwoven with useful nuggets of information. However, think carefully about letting your children play in adult arenas. No teenager is worldly wise. They are decidedly impressionable. The more you permit, the more you are to blame when they begin to harm themselves. The world is a dangerous place. It takes time to learn the skills to navigate it safely.

The precedence principle

The precedence principle states that you put yourself first, your partner second and the children third. How do we justify putting ourselves first? What seems selfish at first turns out to be best for all. 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 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. Parents that are fulfilled end up being better parents. On the occasions where a child does require extra support, you should be in a good frame of mind to provide it. Balance and flexibility

come to the fore. Whilst the emphasis is on you rather than your children, it doesn't mean you can neglect them. You come first, but not always, that is not precedence, that is unwholesome. One can allocate time for all. Nights for things for you – just you. Nights out with your partner and nights with all the family together. If you succumb to guilt when going out without your children in tow you become glum and unhappy. There is no benefit gleaned from unhappy parents. 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 me and my sisters 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.

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. Parenting can be a minefield with many things to dodge and attempt to get right. There are always advantages and disadvantages to any priority you make. Ultimately, a child needs to learn to become independent. If you manage that you are a successful parent.

Step parenting

People like to think that it shouldn't matter whether the children in your care are biologically yours or not; step parenting is the same as any other parenting. That can be wishful thinking. Families may claim that it is all the same, but when the relationship breaks down a gulf emerges. 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 half-yours. Accepting that 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. They would be no different from rules any guest would be expected to follow whilst in your home. Rules are not the same as ideals. We don't tend to impose our ideology on other people's children that live elsewhere, so perhaps they need not be imposed on step children. Explain your ideals by all means. Tell them what you believe, but make it clear that it is your way of thinking and not something they need copy.

If you have experienced testing times with your own children, then brace yourself for a whole new set of challenges with step children. Half-yours is monumentally different for not-yours. As a biological parent, pay close attention to the responses of the newly incumbent step parent. Violence and abuse towards children that are not biologically ours is fantastically higher than it is towards those that are half-thiers. Humans are not the only animals that can be malicious to offspring derived from former relationships. In part, the issue stems from the lack of bonding that usually takes place, nicely, shortly after birth. When that crucial early-days-bonding is not evident, the care we have towards the child can be most lacking. Assume nothing. Neither step mothers nor step fathers are better or worse in regards their attitude towards children in their care.

The start of the step parent/child relationship story ought to be a wonderful magical spell. However, magical intentions rarely produce magical bliss. It takes time for people to adjust and accept you. It takes time to build a connection. Distancing yourself at the start is fine. Focusing your attention on your new partner is the key, involving the step children little by little.

We don't expect to get on with everyone we meet in our lives. Characters clash. We all see things differently. This principle applies with step children too. Wait for the child to approach you

in a positive manner and 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 being quite awkward. They are renowned for wanting to cause disruption in the hope that you disappear thus allowing their real mother/father to return.

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, it may be wise to stand aside and let the biological parents deal with the situation. You are entitled to voice your opinions but only a few gain true authority despite the time they put in over the years. Some do get to a point where they love and regard a step child as one of their own, whilst others wonder why they bothered to put in so much effort. Not everyone will consider it as a failure if you don't become best friends. Some will show appreciation for your sacrifices and dedication, others not so much. The rest may be resentful. 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 biological 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 vilest of people throughout the world, it seems pointless trying to interfere with this bond.

Joe and John are genetically identical. At birth they looked identical, so their mother painted one of Joe's toenails 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, and they had a child too. 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

Outside the home we struggle to get our voice heard, whereas around the dinner table we have been recipients of our wretched ideals, our contradictory inconsistent morals, and our hardline politics. Our blessed children are the perfect fodder for all of this. 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. Bias is unavoidable. However, too many refuse to let their children build their own moral framework.

We think our political persuasion is the fairest and we are therefore keen to promote it. We force our children to adhere to our religions and ideologies. We scold them if they do not do as we do. If they were to investigate other religions, other ideologies are you frightened that they would find something better? Would that cast doubt on the robustness of what you practice. Surely if what you believe is as emphatically solid as you claim it to be, then they will follow it too. You would not fear them investigating other religions/ideologies as you know that what you hold to be true is unchallengeable and unsurpassable.

There will be untold critics of this text and that is a positive. Criticism helps us examine what we propose. Critics can be brushed aside like we swipe a fly off our food if what we propose is valid. The more critics we encounter the better we get at building rigorous ripostes. All faiths have imperfections so we might point them out to show honesty. Many though are adamant that their faith is flawless.

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 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. 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. Any one of several billion of your brothers or sisters could have been born instead of you. 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 having

children 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 different challenges 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.

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 consult 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 potential. Less women take leadership roles because the majority do not want to lead. They feel more secure with male figures at the helm of organisations.

We can hunt for sections of our genes that can spell out what sex we are, but this is still subject to the whims of 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. Rational rather than emotional thoughts are not more prevalent in either of the genders. There are huge sections of the female population that are more rational than large chunks of the male population. There are untold numbers of men that express emotions more clearly than typical women. Societies may curb the propensity to express logic or emotions of one gender and encourage the other. This can make one gender appear less emotive or more rational than they are at heart.

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 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 he/she 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.

You can stamp your feet and scream blue murder. You can make people feel ashamed of themselves if they get your gender mixed up. You can pass any law you like. What you will never do is change the opinion of everyone. Some people will always view you as a man or a woman, as male or female, no matter how forcefully you protest.

Providing equal chances, and the same respect for all, need not become a deterrent from expressing femininity/masculinity. We need not copy the pack and feel obliged to dress neutrally. 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.

High jump competitions: match groups of people by height not gender. Swimming races: group competitors by height and weight. Punching competitions: arrange fight offs between those of roughly the same weight. Those with lower testosterone levels can be matched with competitors that have a slightly lower weight or lower height. There will be advantages and disadvantages no matter how fair you try to make the world. Beautiful people earn lots of money showcasing clothing. It is not just beauty at play; gender dictates how much they are valued too. Meritocracy is flawed. People made no effort to be who they are fundamentally. They were born beautiful, born smart, born agile, or born with the potential to be capable in certain fields. Single person toilets provide privacy for all.

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.

Is sex a different thing to gender? Male plugs are inserted into female sockets. They are genders not sex. Men can act as male role models. The expected role of people of certain genders pressure us in certain ways. The roles differ by nation. The roles evolve and change. Male and female are concepts that differ from person to person. Some will see a male as the plug, the person who has a penis that can be inserted into a female. They will also claim that the female is the one with the orifice that can have a penis inserted into it. From this basic interpretation of the concept of male and female we can have a cornucopia of other ways of seeing things. A glance at the insect world helps us become more receptive to seeing sex and reproduction as complicated and inconsistent.

We can believe that male and female are simply artificial constructs; the individual decides whether they are a man, woman, boy, girl, intersex, male female etc. Some people have babies, some do not. That is true, all else is contrived contentious speculation.

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 iso-sexual intimacy. They find it more abhorrent than having sex with someone aged or disfigured or jolly unattractive. We place close attention to the written and unwritten guidelines of acceptable sexual behaviour. 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. 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 taken part in 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 sexual practices *unless* it's iso-sexual. Oral sex in all manner of positions is practiced between a whole range of deviants. Gender is unimportant in this regard. It makes no odds what you have down below when kissing or caressing.

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. 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 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. Finding love is a game, 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 when the person you are with no longer resembles who you thought they were. The mask lifts revealing the truth.

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. There will be very little in the way of grief, perhaps relief instead. 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 lots of 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, 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. This type of infidelity 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 are not sleeping with the same skin and blood as the former partner was. It is fresh skin you are touching today and new hair that you are running your fingers through. 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. They do not want to take your partner from you and live happily ever after, they want 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. They are like mosquitoes lurking and waiting for you to stop fidgeting. You swat one and think that is the end of it, for another to crawl through an unforeseen gap in your defences.

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 nice to feel 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. Many of us treasure quirks. They add something.

We can look elsewhere for something better and find ourselves exchanging one problem for another. 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? Usually we are drawn to those that are similar to us. 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.

What we display can run counter to our intentions. Teenagers can be a little mean or nasty towards those they fancy. As they mature, they find better ways to court a lover. We might assume that someone is a rude individual due to their offish manner. However, we may have caught them at a bad time. They may be in the middle of a bereavement and be very different on another occasion. People deserve more than one chance. At some point, it is bound to be you too that deserves another chance. "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." Thank heavens, thank your god, thank anything you like that we are not all so stilted and all so similar. There are many a person who passes way beyond the mid-life age marker retaining no clue whatsoever of how other people think. The ugly side of the ignorance paradox: not grasping that other people have different desires and look for different things in life.

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.

Handcuffs are used to detain convicts. They are also found in abundance in dominatrix circles. Whips are used to make a horse run faster. They have a use on the sex scene along with gloves, footwear, and various uniforms. There are untold items with dual uses. The primary use of these items is understood by most, but people are perplexed by why they would be used for erotica. Items and actions. Do you think that some items and actions are despicable deviancy or enthralling erotica? Dressing up in adult sized nappies or being trampled on. Having someone urinating on you. Watching someone pop balloons in high heels. Finding your self is finding your pleasure. There are also a good few who have no interest in sex whatsoever.

We all lie somewhere on the autistic spectrum. The more you appreciate why other people like doing what they do, the less autistic you are.

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 to engage 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. Using words on paper, he explained how he appreciated the conversations immensely.

The satisfaction of sex

Occasionally, sex is love making. Usually, sex is pure lust. Some explore sensuality. A few seek an insight into sensory sex, discovering it using the animal machine. Technically these four things, making love, lust, sensuality and sensing are distinct, but invariably lines are blurred. Whatever the case, all forms of sexual activity can be satisfying. 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.

Whilst the missionary position is probably a most underrated way of bonding, there is a lot more to explore than just lying on top of

one another. We want more but to get more, we need to broach the subject with our partner. That can be difficult. Many will introduce 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, people claim to *just do x*, but actually do a, b, j, f, and n too, but keep quiet about it. 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 urinated 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. Will the person being asked to be part of the sexual act suffer any physiological harm. Is the act being requested or is someone being cajoled. In this case, it is doubtful that any physiological harm will ensue. 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?

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 hope that our partner will feel guilty for not obliging. They don't feel any guilt. 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 yourself.

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 and return the favour later. Ebb and flow. More focus on you today, more on your partner tomorrow.

To find hyper-excitement we must try different things. Alas, some things will not spark joy, but they are stepping stones to things that will. 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. Variety is the spice of sex.

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 jumps into life the moment a new opportunity presents itself. Some find themselves endlessly searching for more. This relentless search for a new slant can get 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 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, but 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 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 visibility 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.

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 showing 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.

The climax of many a pornographic film entails; the male participant gleefully ejaculating over the lady's face. If not their face, then maybe her breasts or back. One way or another we see the ejaculation. Not only is it difficult to film an ejaculation inside the virginal canal, but it makes for a more entertaining, more dramatic, more thrilling scene. Whilst it makes the film more appealing to watch, it might not be something either participant particularly enjoys. It is for the benefit of the film rather than to maximise pleasure from the sexual act. People watch these films and copy the actors believing that ejaculating in this way is stylish and positive. We learn too much by copying. We think that our partner will be impressed by our prowess and that it gives us kudos with our friends. It may do the opposite. You could be marked down as a dunce instead. Great people have the confidence to stick to what they like, rather than succumb to what other people think is great. We can assume, wrongly, that our lover will be thrilled by doing things we have seen others do.

They say: 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 or sand in your genitalia drowns out the pleasure.

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. What you find attractive, others may find unattractive. What repels you, draws others in. 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 the beauty slowly seeps out. Attraction can build steadily. Quirks, facial injuries and oddities can add to someone's appeal. Whilst many will show an instinctive repellence towards someone that is far removed from the mathematical ideal, others gravitate towards them.

Facial recognition takes practice, the more you are exposed to faces from different ancestries, the better you become at distinguishing them. Hence, foreigners can all look alike, so to speak, at first. 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 heavy makeup 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 researchers interviewed hundreds of people. 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 the interviewers started with were wrong. There was no common theme. There were no norms found. 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 all depends on the individual rather than the type of genitalia we have. We worry needlessly about premature ejaculation. Have sex. Ejaculate. Take a short rest. Then have some more sex. Men 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 a little in some areas, you can compensate using flattery, compliments, niceties, respect and most important of all; 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. Believing it to be wrong when in a relationship is idiotic. Those that believe it is wrong can keep that belief so long as they have sex at least twenty-five times per month. 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. Gold is rarer than silver. Some people prefer fat chested women, I and many others prefer slim chested women. They are gold, fifty times more valuable than pronounced silver ones.

Procreation

From time to time, you will come across a family where one of the children stands out from the rest. Who is the father? Rather than making accusations and causing upset, you say nothing. Cuckolding seems to be prevalent in more than just the bird species. A woman may have regular sex with their partner for months on end and fail to conceive yet conceives immediately following a single event with someone else.

There is a devious mechanism at work, surreptitious and inspired. An egg is released and held at the top of the tube. It can be held there waiting for a few days and released spontaneously to fuse with the seed of an interloper. This mechanism works subconsciously. We may consider the interloper 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 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 yours, half your partners. A grandchild is a quarter yours. Descendants ten generations down the line will have genetics derived from over a thousand people.

Biology enables children to have children. Biologically mature but mentally and emotionally less so. 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. The older we as parents become the more birth defects, miscarriages and other problems we are likely to encounter. 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 when young, 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: Girl meets boy. They fall in love. They get married and consummate it. From that point on they only have sex when they want another child. The sex is for procreation and nothing more. The fairy-tale is supported by tradition and abides to long held customs. This fairy-tale is fictitious and fanciful. It belies palpability in our disparate 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 not much above 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 intercourse had anything to do with the children that emerged. 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.

Nations set an age of consent for sex. It is different across nations and to some extent rather arbitrary. Those that reach the age of consent may not have the maturity to make an informed choice, nor fully understand what they are agreeing to, however, for practical purposes a line needs to be drawn. The age of consent assumes most will be able to make reasoned choices at that point. 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 children must deal with this issue without any interaction with them. Self-restraint is a constant challenge - never ending thoughts that often lead to unacceptable actions. Some have a powerful affinity that society rightly wants kept in tight check. We can't change our affinity.

Recidivism rates for child sex offenders are unacceptably high. Paedophiles are sent to prison for an offence, they serve a sentence, then on release reoffend once again. Other solutions are available. Removal of the chemical system that causes the sexual arousal and excitement is one 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.

Those that abuse the young may not be paedophiles – they are not drawn towards children specifically. They are instead, opportunistic predators. They will exploit children in their care, children in the family, or children that they have contact with on a regular basis. These predators may have an equal attraction to adults, but prey on children because children are naïve, easily manipulated, and more easily controlled than an adult.

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. 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 a baby than it is a teenager, or adult 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 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.

Real complete penises do need a slightly longer washing routine. Circumcisions marginally help with cleanliness, but the price is horrific. 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 off 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 knowledge 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. 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 game of snakes and ladders entails throwing dice and moving from the start square to the end square. Along the way you may get lucky and land upon a ladder helpfully moving you forward some distance. Aside from ladders there are snakes which take you back many squares. In the game of love you will encounter snakes, lots of them, far more snakes than ladders. To begin the game, you place your piece on the board - simply say hello to your prospective date. From there you must engage in the best way you can. Try you must, to hold a conversation.

Requesting a date is one more step, a big step that we need to muster the courage, skill and nerve for. Confidently or shyly, we summon the nerve to ask our victim for contact details or if we can arrange a meeting sometime soon. 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. Determined to break through the fear, they venture out and approach a target. It seemed so easy in our imagination to approach someone, but the reality is so different. Despite the courage we thought we had mustered, we 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 of rejection and fear of embarrassment. To overcome any fears, we must face them head on, over and over, a little step at a time. Eventually we can transform ourselves into an un-embarrassable being.

If you stumble your words or say something daft, panic not, make a joke out of it. Continue after a mistake as though all is normal, nothing amiss. The finesse: stare into the eyes to show seriousness and mix in a downward all over body stare to flirt.

We might not want to trouble someone. Some of us will not want to be bothered but most are happy to speak to people so long as they take the hint if we want them to move away. It is a balancing act. On the one hand most people are willing to talk to anyone irrespective of whether there is prospect of romance in the air. On the other hand, many people don't learn how to make their excuses and leave someone alone. One conversation is rarely enough. We bond over time. Therefore, some people need some convincing that you are the one for them. Sometimes people are glad that they were worn down by your persistence.

If you want to win, you need to see rejection as a test. You tried and failed. At least you tried. There are people that do not take

your fancy. You have no interest in them whatsoever. If there are people that you do not have the slightest bit of interest in, then others will be the same. If there are plenty you would never marry, then that applies to other people too. They, like you will not marry someone that doesn't meet certain criteria. If you are free to choose, then so are they. You believe you are worthy yet mark others down as unworthy. You do. They do. It is personal, after all it is a potential inter-personal relationship at stake.

Some take rejection as an offence. They retaliate. It moves from wanting to get with someone 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 once they find a partner?

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, 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 bait 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 suitors 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. Most need the approval of others. In many cases subconscious signals from others sway you before you get past the first mile marker. Society puts pressure on us providing dissent or affirmation regarding our dating choice. This impacts our confidence we have in our decision to continue or not.

Women will always flock towards the alpha-male in their droves, as they have done since our species came into being. This draw is strong and relentless. It is an instinctive natural desire that stands the test of time. 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. You make approaches to people that are unlikely to reject you. Easier targets should not give you too much trouble. You assumed wrong. They are not easy to pair off with either. 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.

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.

Politicians speak regularly about financial poverty. Far less is said in the public domain about relationship poverty. Being in relationship poverty can lower your life expectancy, lower your life satisfaction levels and destroy one's sense of self-worth. The stalk of the happiness flower can be made of gold instead of flesh and bones. We are all different. However, our pity we have for those that lack gold differs from the pity we have for those that lack someone to be with.

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, perhaps? 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? She crystallised in my mind; how vital it is to look after yourself. 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 seem 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 an 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 effect 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 that 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 is based on how we feel about ourselves - inside.

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.

Inner beauty is reflected on the outside. Inner beauty is portrayed through our physical body. The outside side impacts the inside. Inner beauty is not distinct from our outer shell.

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. Contempt runs along a chain, one person held in higher regard than others, finding ever more irrational reasons to look down on the next in line. Even the lowest of the low will take pride in small accomplishments and sticking to couth principles. We are all valid, equal, so say I, but we respect those that shine in certain areas. We are also 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; we all make mistakes. Hence some latitude can be given to those that get our name wrong once or twice but thrice shows a lack of effort. 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? It could be significant, but we can read too much into one thing. Was Laura disregarding me? A little. She was what one might call, being diplomatic with me. 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 one regarding the animal machine. 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. It has 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 sufferance. 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 always be highly one sided. That is never good. The story still needs completing. It needs a more gratifying transition.

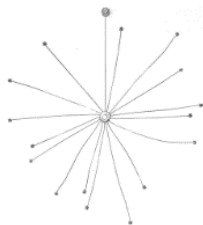
Belief

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 my behaviour inadvertently clumsy.



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. It is a 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. Steer conversations away from mental or emotional issues that have kept someone single, perhaps?

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 all 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 people give 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 their things. They are visiting you for that reason only. It doesn't make any difference whether you are convivial or attempt to make things difficult. They stubbornly refuse to entertain the idea of getting back together again. It is over. We have no control over their mind, only are own. We can sort our thought processes out quickly or slowly.

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. Turn the thumb screws down hard. 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 you. 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. That is what makes 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

I look back. We take stock and evaluate what we have. There are plenty of people that I get on very well with. 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 about 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 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 providing someone with 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. Exceptional beauty grabs our attention but that is not what most want.

The world has a system that only suits some. Tests, exams and ways to compare you 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 but only in certain ways. Megan's real problem was the inability to spin plates. Spinning plates; lots of projects on the go at the same time. Repairs, forms to complete, people to see, accounts to complete, deadlines to meet. If Megan

studied, took exam, studied next subject, took exam and so on she would have excelled in every subject. However, being obliged to sit lots of exams in a short space of time was painful.

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 their naivety and inexperience of the subject. Most of us lack compassion towards those suffering grief. 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 than talking to the living. Talk to the one you have lost daily, hourly if you want. You are not insane. You have joined a club that do this 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 thereby 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 it is not becoming of me to be like that. Maybe I could win competitions and collect prizes for being narcissist of the day. The greatest most prestigious narcissist. 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 have 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

I want to be included. I want to count. I want to be respected. I want to be heard. I want a say. I want to be noticed. Feeling needed, presence felt. I want people to care about me. I want others to know what I have been doing. I want my achievements recognised. I could live alone. I could talk to no one. I could live my life in isolation from all others. I look down at my dog who enjoys my company and relies on me for food. I have to abandon her too if I am to relinquish all sense of power, control and the desire to be needed. Our pets, our parents, our children, our friends and those we work with, wait for us, observe us and communicate with us. Interactions that amplify our sense of existing.

Through abandonment we learn of what it is to count. Once abandoned, we no longer matter as much, if at all, to those we once lived alongside. Through abandonment we relinquish control and have no power over someone as we once had. And they have no power over us either. We are no longer needed. We may think about those we abandon from time to time. We do not necessarily forget those we have abandoned entirely. Something may trigger us to think a little about those we no longer interact with, but their relevance in our lives diminishes.

The moment we have a child we are most needed. Our children need our love, care and attention. We gain a greater sense of purpose. That is until they are able to fend for themselves and fly the nest. When they are gone, there is a chasm of emptiness left behind. The desire to be needed sits aside the desire to control and attain power. The desire to be needed: Missed if not home at a designated hour. Missed if not at work. Needed to drive a vehicle. Needed at the helm of an organisation. Needed to rule the nation. Different extremes, but the same sense of you being needed by others.

You have been controlled throughout your life. Your parents controlled you the best way they could. Your teachers controlled you the best way they could. Religions control people. You will control others too if you can, if you feel the desire. We are controlled through myths and legends. Stories are told to encourage us to abide. We do things without understanding why. Control stems from copying. To learn we copy. A lady cut the ends off her ham before putting it in the oven. She did so because she copied her mother who would cut the ends off. And her mother did this because she copied her mother, the lady's grandmother. When the lady asked her grandmother why? She found out that it was so that it would fit in the tray she used. So here we have a

grandchild accustomed to doing something, copying her mother and grandmother, despite having a bigger dish and it being entirely unnecessary. Control through observance to tradition.

We control to make things safer, more efficient, more orderly. Controlling others is also rather enjoyable. We take pleasure from it, seeing things run how we want them to be run. Some will start a new business so that they have greater control. If we can see an opportunity to improve how a business operates, we need to take control. When in control we can change things to improve profitability and enhance customer service.

People in control make the rules and set the boundaries. Parents will decide what time children will go to bed, and politicians will enact laws to control the populace. Parents decide what their children can and can't do, politicians keep control to balance freedoms with anarchy. Despite some rules being zany, irrational or illogical, a society with rules works better for most than societies without rules. Control is both a bugbear and a necessity. The ideas behind control will always be tinkered with to adapt to changing circumstances. Nature controls population levels. Humans control one another to keep ideologies in check.

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 delegate. 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 - often people with better technical skills than them. Decent employees will do their duty and more, show creativity and flourish. They are aided by simple signs of appreciation from those they work for. They don't need managers standing over them watching their every move. Empower. 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, no one stays in power forever. 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.

In many circles, popularity helps you cement power. Popularity is not the same as being universally liked. Being popular means people listen to you. Popular people get the most attention. People respect those that are popular and assist their rise in power. 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.

Presentation is everything. Effective presentation needs to be clear and professional. We believe information far more if it is presented well. How something is presented matters. Little credence is given to the same facts presented poorly. Who presents something matters. Hence, why people will dress to impress too. Qualifications give people belief that they are worthy of instructing others, but qualifications may be a poor substitute for knowledge and experience. We make our own minds up in regards who we believe, though how we are taken in by controlling forces dictates how often we challenge qualified people.

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. Power makes us feel special. Power satisfies the selfish drive in us. Power makes us count. Power will get us heard. Power makes us feel needed.

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 resist getting 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.

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. All powerful people were born small and feeble. They grow in stature because of our weird reverence towards them.

Some people believe that the truth is being held from them. In some cases, they may be right. However, exaggeration, lies, and preposterous notions are countered by sensible argument. You can reduce the number of wild thoughts people have lingering in their minds by tackling their arguments head on. In the process other people will be listening in and they too will be wondering about the same thing. The nationwide enthusiasm for a 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 based on ignorance. Those in power benefit from incomplete truths. Politics, science, and information distributors will include what they want to include to support their agenda. Information that runs counter to their claims are held back.

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. We control the masses by making some subjects taboo. We disallow debate. Voices are shut down, muted, or drowned out by persistent messaging. It has become dangerous in some nations to voice our opinions. 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, comrades will take action on their own, on your behalf.

The masses are implored by a small number of activists to take notice of their grievances. Clever cunning people make it seem as though 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.

Allow, approve, block, sway, encourage and govern. Items associated with power. However, beneath the actions of power there is respect and the sense of being in control. Some need the sense of power even if they are not the one that is truly guiding things. A family feud can arise when someone loses that sense

of power. One can give people the sense without having to give in to unreasonable demands. A compromise maybe needed, but you can get your way whilst the one in power believes they still have authority. One would give credit to the one in power despite it being you that leads and it being you that drove everyone through the maze. You don't have to be the one who is praised and recognized, fixing the issue is more important. Make a suggestion to the one with the power and allow them some time to think about it. The one in power will announce the edict and claim responsibility for the idea.

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 a 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 power.

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 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. We utter words in the hope that we 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 a message. 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. Beauty is power too. Refusing to talk to someone is power. The self at the centre of it all.

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 raise 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.

Micro societies, namely gangs, want respect, acknowledgement, influence, credence and to be taken seriously. Gang leaders are not smitten by the idea of backing down when challenged. Pride is pleasure. The most powerful power trick of all; being able to swallow your pride. Once you become comfortable with burying your pride, you can have pride in your ability to bury your pride.

Some may pretend to be naïve, allowing others to think they are a bit stupid. Or pretend they are poor. Or pretend they are incapable. Pretend in some way. For this ploy to work, one must keep the pretence going for an extended period of time. Few pretend for long though as they feel the need to put people straight. To show them, to regain pride in themselves. We prove ourselves to people we may never see again. We want to keep our head held high as we retain an image of ourselves in our head. We care about the image of ourselves stored in our head. 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 can take pride in your resilience.

There are numerous fungi that appear to take over the bodies of ants. This makes them do bizarre things. Most perish soon after infection. This behaviour manipulation is not reserved for ants

alone, populations can have their behaviour manipulated too. Not by fungi but by psychological warfare. It is usually a slow, step by step process. Whether it is a war or a fundamental change in ideology, small numbers press a system on to the masses. Changes are made little by little until a watershed moment and it is too late for the duped to do much about it. The masses may comprise many 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. Fear controls. Fear helps the powerful. Fear makes the powerful appear needed.

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. With mindless mind games abound, it can take a long time to break down linguistic devices to get somewhere.

Words can have different meanings in different contexts: ambiguity. Where there is more than one meaning of a word, don't be surprised when someone takes another meaning to what you implied to trash what you are saying. Our central point to our argument is often ignored by shifting the focus onto an element of what we said. 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. Does a branch falling 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, a passive observer, does not affect the creation of those vibrations.

Qualified

We listen more intently to those with qualifications than the common man. Qualified people can be stuck with conventional thinking though. Rising above the qualified person is the someone with fame. We listen to them far too much. Your challenge is to determine who to believe.

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 including highly experience qualified people.

As we gain experience, we become more confident. As pilots fly more hours, the accident rate goes up not down, peaking at around 150 hours. Over-confident and not experienced enough. You are safer flying with someone with 75 hours practice than 150. Best of all, someone with 300 hours or more. Likewise, the saying; a little knowledge is a dangerous thing. If you know nothing you leave alone. If you know a lot, you do it properly.

I would rather get clarification even it invites the odd snigger. 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. "Negative, field not in sight." I heard a little chuckle in the controller's voice. Most usually see the runway well before that point. As I can't see it, they are now obliged to direct me. However, I don't end up flying where I should not be flying and end up looking truly idiotic. People soon forget little instances like this but point out big mistakes.

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.

I say dogs have four legs. You say that is not always the case and point out that you have seen three legged dogs. Stating that all dogs have four legs is not necessarily true. And quite correct you are as some will lose a leg through injury and may even be born like that. An exception to the rule but also a distraction. We all know that dogs in general have four legs. Sometimes it will be necessary to be precise and complete in presenting an argument, but quite often you will get those that bring up irrelevances.

Humans are adept at using selectively chosen statistics to back up their argument. Data can be used to show very different things. A sector of the economy was shown to be in decline. As a proportion of all economic activity the percentage was indeed dropping, but the value was actually rising every year. With other parts of the economy rising much faster, it makes that sector appear to be getting smaller. Seeing it as expanding or contracting depends upon which way you want to view it. If something is said

to have increased by 50% that can sound alarming. That is until you read the detail; the cases rose from 4 to 6 out of 100000.

Full story

Many arguments stem from laziness: Why doesn't the moon spin on its axis ask some. It seems strange that we only get to see one side of the moon from earth. Surely a fragment of rock from a passing meteorite could hit the moon and make it turn. Rather than spend a minute looking up the reason they spend twenty minutes discussing it with you. Gravity creates a bulge that locks it in place.

People insinuate that those that claimed to be the first to land on the moon, did not. It was a 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 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 in 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.

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 he 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 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, they change the picture completely. Parts from an aeroplane were found 11 miles from a crash site. That is a huge distance and would indicate that the aeroplane 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.

Young and eager we enter debates with enthusiasm. We strive to get our points across and are dismayed when people don't fully understand what we are saying. One day we take a break. We listen. We understand that all debates need not be won. Some people are not worth arguing with. Some people will work it all out by themselves. On some occasions we find the patience to carefully explain things to those that are misguided. Explaining things in such a way that it avoids causing offence. We reserve our energy for the debates that have greater significance. We stop worrying so much as we did in our youth about whether people take on board what we say.

The philosopher's curse

Philosophy is renowned for its complex language. Philosophical debate gets wrapped up in semantics - meanings of many words. It is kept complicated via the use of rare and clever sounding words to exclude undesirables. A trick employed by many a society and numerous clubs to keep them out. The jargon we use regularly in our circles is often bewildering to outsiders.

What is philosophy anyway? The skeleton of the truth. Scratching an itch. Looking for answers through discussion and thought. I like to make a proposition and gauge the reaction from others. I need to see if the arguments behind the proposition are strong or weak. Where weak, I adjust the arguments to strengthen them.

Sometimes we need to stick to an opinion despite the opposition. Progress would not have been made were one to give up too early. Time can be wasted by sticking to a line of thought for too long. When does one decide to change direction? There is no

answer to that. Belief and faith dictate the length of time you persevere with a line of enquiry. Dogmatism can both be a saving grace and a way to fail. Sometimes people are right, but their reasoning is erroneous.

Saying that nothing is absolute, and everything will always be open to question may be correct, but it can be a curse. Leaving it be, can be unsatisfactory. With some persistence we usually reach clarity on a subject. The only way section shows an absolute. It provides the foundation to understand the definitive nature of the universe. However, the foundation blocks produce extreme complexity. Add in the existence of random chaos and it can be quite difficult to be absolutely certain of anything beyond how things structure at the basic level.

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. My 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.

Those adhering to a stoic philosophy accept that there is nothing they can do about certain things. So, there is little point worrying about these things. To be a stoic one needs to decide what is in their control and what is not. They determine what they can change and what they can't. The error would be found in what they differentiated. They believed something could not be changed. What if lots of people want to see change. Change can be possible in lots of situations if there is the will to make those changes.

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. We fully understood what someone was saying but feel inclined to correct their grammatical errors.

"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 a 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 disorderly account of the ordeal is highly likely to be telling the truth.

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. People that avoid arguments allow discontentment to stew. Bonds are made when we argue a little.

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.

Complaints and counter claims; 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. Explain everything that 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 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 leave as fast as possible.

Pettiness

From squabbling over tiny amounts of money to arguing furiously over who's turn it is. We can all be rather petty at times, but pettiness has a purpose. Pettiness is each party being counsel, jury, and judge in a micro court case drama. Pettiness 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. We do not want our moral compass twisted. 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 and 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.

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 petty 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. If you can't win petty arguments, you have no chance winning non-trivial arguments.

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. Here shall be a list of things I have observed during many a conversation.

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.

Echoing

We pass the conversation baton 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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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: I will say what I want to say with the words of my choosing and let you do the same.

The anecdotalist

Some anecdotes are well received. Others, much less so, no matter how well you formulate them. By trying them on different people we find out which people enjoy hearing, and which rouse little amusement or interest. The shorter succinct ones are the best. People struggle to stop yawning when you take too long conveying your story. Say a particular word and out comes the anecdote. Often an anecdote you have heard countless times before.

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.

The wily

Watch out for those that employ gaming tricks. Intentional silences to see who breaks first rather than natural pauses. Phrases and expressions 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.

Conversations contain subtleties, things implied rather than directly said. Those subtleties 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. Gentle, diplomatic ways. We don't want to hurt someone with the real reason but being fobbed off is often more painful. The quicker we find out what is amiss, the quicker we can change, the quicker we can seek the company of others instead.

To desist

Some people really dislike those who interrupt. It is a morality thing at heart. Personal preference. Yet can be vital when someone is in a full throttle lengthy diatribe. Useful if used at the right moment to keep things on subject and on track. We interrupt sometimes 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.

The faux question

To make an interruption appear less harsh and objectionable one can interrupt by asking a question. The question is not polite and proper but a slimy rude obnoxious intervention. The person the question is aimed at will not be given time to answer it. Instead, the person interrupting with the question will interrupt them shortly after the question is posed. They will then talk about themselves now that they have stolen the conversation baton. The best counter is to eradicate them from your life. Alternatively, fire can be fought with fire. Raise your voice, interject and take the baton back.

The intolerant

People are what they are. 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.

Me and myself

Failure to take on board what others are saying is one of the crimes of conversation. We respond by saying something relevant to the subject they started or commit the sin of diverting the conversation away from what they are talking about. The conversation criminals divert it towards something about them.

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. 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.

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.

The subject

Some people are great at sparking off a conversation, some struggle: I ask shop staff, waitresses or anyone anywhere, whether they are enjoying themselves. It allows them to say anything they want and answer how they please. Asking someone if they are busy can be 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.

We all have curiosity, but we are interested in different things. 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. We may loath certain subjects, but we can look for an angle that can be talked about to stay involved. One may not want to listen to someone talking about a subject that is of little interest to you for three hours straight. However, I always uncover noteworthy titbits, things that help in conversations with others. I listen and learn. And what I learn has utility. It is considerationally selfish, nice, to listen and hear the passion and excitement. Listening is kindness. In moderation.

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.

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; 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 excuse ignoring everyone in the queue. All it takes is a quick look at each one in turn, "I'll be with you 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 thirty seconds of arriving at the counter and serve them within two 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 - until we know the price. Salesmen do not want us to know the price until they have had a chance to explain what it is they are selling. People might think something sounds expensive until they comprehend the true value of an item. With an item of standard fare like a common tin of beans, you may put a bold price tag on as you are trying to convey the discount on offer. If your item of jewellery contains 18 carat gold a customer needs to know this, particularly if they are familiar with the cost of similar ones containing 15 carat brass.

Items are marked without the currency symbol, 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 than 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 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 hope the seller feels 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?" Salesmanship is an art and the art is bold. Some 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. Customers ask for things we don't have. I would always say to them that I will 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 to a party, say so. You are not letting anyone down that way.

Let's be abstract here. I am selling a dog. The dog is well behaved. It is house trained. It never bites people. It is most healthy. I took a picture disguising the fact that its tail is a little shorter than it should be on account of it getting caught in the door when the wind blew through the house. It is only a short piece missing, most is fully intact. Here is the problem. Someone pays you and travels a fair distance to take charge of it. Then they see the tail and are not best pleased. Had you told the tale of the tail they would be fine about it. But you didn't tell them the tale of the tail and now they are quite cross.

Tell people what your product has and what it has not before they buy. If they know beforehand, then all is fine, we are happy. If we discover something absent 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 an 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. Instead of just walking away they have sympathy where none is really deserved. When you feel an obligation to buy, but are unsure, 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 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 they are given the said drink, they are killed, cut into uniformly sized 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 her 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 quality of work counts a lot. Businesses that offer a decent service expand the quickest. 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.

As more orders come your way and more people use your service, you will have more problems to sort out. Customers are not always right, but problems need to be dealt with. If they start stacking up, it causes a lot of stress. As each issue pops up, just deal with it. Either refund, replace or sort an alternative, unemotionally. I say again, just deal with it there and then if you can. 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 most customers give you more help than hindrance. 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. 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.

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. Those trying to obtain money for a business venture will turn up in a flash car wearing, a swanky set of clothes, and showy jewellery. So too will those trying to lure someone to lie on their back for a lay. You are hoping that by portraying yourself as smart, assured, and professional, any investment will be safe. 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

You can't see it. You can't touch it. You can occasionally smell its presence, people exude it - kind of, sort of. You get out of bed for it. It is important. You argue because of it. It makes you do things that you would not ordinarily do. We steal it and help others have it. It is both imaginary yet real. Are you thinking I am talking about love? Or something else? If it was not love, then you are a dreary individual.

I can swap my bananas for your wheat. Today one cup of wheat for two bananas. Tomorrow it will be two cups for five bananas. Yesterday I didn't want any bananas, but I had surplus wheat, so I swapped my bananas for a piece of metal. The metal is shiny and soft. It does not rot nor tarnish. I can make golden jewellery with it or bash it for a few hours and make it so very thin that it can affordably gild an ornate picture frame. I can store my bits of metal for times when I am hungry, or in need of a few favours.

I can store my pieces of metal in a secret place. I can place it under the ground however, a dependable grifter is offering to take charge of gold and silver with a promise to return it at a later time with a premium attached. He will return eleven pieces of silver for ten handed to him. This will be after we both witness twelve new moons. He is no fool for he will use these tokens to provide others with the means to obtain goods that they can then trade. You see, if they place hundreds of bananas upon a ship and sail to another world, they can exchange them for something that we prize here.

When I hand my metal pieces to the dependable grifter he makes a sincere promise to return them. He makes a note of how many pieces I have deposited with him. It is written down in a ledger and a receipt is given to me. I can quite legitimately hand my receipt to someone else who will give me goods in exchange for it. The only caveat is that they will have to wait quite a while before they can redeem the receipt for the pieces of metal. This type of receipt is a bond. It has a redemption date and a coupon - interest.

Some people store their pieces of metal under the bed. They retrieve them during the winter, when it is cold and the skies are grey, to swap them for food and fuel for the fire. They work long hours during the nice summer days and rest when things stop growing. They copy animals who bury nuts for leaner times. What frustrates both the nut hoarding animals and the metal hoarding apes, are thieves and villains who will take things that they did not store. People steal your stash if it is not hidden well. The apes can leave their stash with the dependable grifter who has a bunch

of vicious friends that will guard it well. One can deposit pieces of metal with the dependable grifter with a different understanding than mentioned before. With this other understanding, one need not wait twelve new moons, nor one new moon, nor any new moons. One can ask for their metal pieces back at any time. The dependable grifter offers pieces of paper showing that he owes you an amount of silver and gold. The pieces of paper guarantee the return of the metal. That guarantee can be transferred to others in lieu of goods and services on offer.

The dependable grifter guarantees the return. How dependable is he though? He has form. He has people that vouch for him. People have used his services for a long time and trust him. People have confidence in him. Money is confidence.

The dependable grifter has one hundred pieces of gold and has issued one hundred pieces of paper promising the return of them. Each piece has been cast to a set weight. Obtaining gold is a laborious task. It entails digging holes, deep in the ground, or panning specs from freezing cold streams, deep in the forest. Printing promissory notes is fast and easy. What if the dependable grifter printed more notes than he has gold pieces for?

Capital

Capitalists are the scum of the earth. They are selfish. They are greedy villains. They should be banished from all societies and replaced by upstanding empathetic socialists. Socialists will take your pieces of silver and swap them for a promise, not a promissory note, a promise. They take everyone's pieces of silver and gold and pool them. After helping themselves to a few, they exchange what is left for food and fuel. They intend to keep all warm and well fed, especially those that are less inclined to work enthusiastically. They promise that everyone will be bestowed a home to live in. They promise food will be freely available to nourish all. They guarantee employment for everyone too. Those promises are usually kept. However, the devil is in the detail.

The socialist leaders and their families will get the prime locations. Their mantra for the rest: sufficient quantity over quality. The homes will be built to a low standard. Many homes will be ones that you share with other families. Separate bedrooms, but shared kitchen and bathrooms. Your behaviour will be strictly monitored. Those that follow the socialist commands correctly, to the letter, will get rewarded a better home, a home with a few more frills. The food will be bland and often stale. The choice paltry. The job that you will be assigned will be arduous, tedious and unrewarding.

Lucy is, to put it mildly, quite attractive. She is the first out of bed in the mornings. She is ambitious. She has more brawn and muscle than three quarters of the men. She has plans. She has spoken to people that are willing to give her a bag of silver, twenty pieces of silver, if she would erect a fence for them. The sheep are a nightmare. They wander off and fall into the creeks. They eat the food growing in the fields. They need containing to some degree. She has the willpower, the strength, the eagerness, the good looks. She has everything one could possibly need except a tool to dig the holes and a saw to cut the wood. She fluttered her eyelids at the man who forges the steel hoping that he would lend her what she needs, but alas no joy. She needs ten pieces of silver to swap for the tools.

The dependable grifter offers her a bargain. He loans her the silver in return for, no not for sexual services, but for a cut of that bag of silver that she will get when the job is complete. She agrees. She is happy. The cut is relatively small. Is this a fair bargain?

There are two ways of building a business, using capital from the start or growing organically. To grow a business organically one sells/produces/manufactures something. The profits are re-invested so that over time one sells/produces/manufactures more each month. You have more money to buy more raw materials, more stock, more tools and thereby have more to sell. To fast track the process, one can borrow money to buy more supplies and increase what you make and sell. The borrowed money enables you to increase your output and therefore your profit. From that extra profit one compensates the lender. You share in the bounty of extra production.

As people get old, they lose agility, strength and stamina. They are neither able to work as hard nor for so long as they once could. Many amass a bundle of metal pieces since joining the workforce. They can put this money to work. It can be used to sustain a humble existence until they become very frail and pass away. People like Lucy can benefit from the excess funds held by the dependable banker on behalf of the old. It is quid pro quo. It is beneficial to all. Positive capitalism: borrowing for tools, machinery or supplies. The borrower gets more back than they spent, including interest. Negative capitalism: The borrower will pay interest on top of the purchase price and not get back more than they spend. Borrow to spend rather spend what has been saved up. Borrowing to buy a new bed is negative capitalism. Unless you are a prostitute and use the bed for work, it will be used then dumped. No money will be made from it.

The dependable grifter is seen about the town drinking, getting fatter by the day from over-indulging in the finest food. This has

not gone unnoticed by some that want to emulate his lifestyle. They call themselves the union of socialist workers group. They are a group. They conspire in union. They have written a manifesto outlining socialist principles. Their work is not so much back breaking but time consuming. They will live comfortably by exchanging the silver pieces given to them by those joining their union. They demand a membership fee to be paid not once, but periodically. Namely, when the silver has all melted away. In return for that membership fee, true workers will get bargaining power with those that employ them.

No system of society is perfect. No system is fair for all. Some systems will suit some a lot more than others. The collective system: What if the tool fabricator made tools as required, to be used by those that need them. What if the shepherd looked after the sheep. What if the farmer, miller and baker made enough bread for all. What if we all worked together in lovely harmony. Collectively, joyously. If we did, we would have no need for the dependable grifter and his promissory notes.

At the start of this book, I made one thing very clear. We are all selfish. We must be selfish. We can be co-considerationally selfish at times. We will always be more productive, more ingenious, more creative, more hopeful if what we do is mainly for us and our close family.

Farmers have been set quotas. They meet the quotas. Everyone is happy. Year after year with little change. Until. Farmers have been offered an alternative arrangement; meet the quota and everything else that you produce is for you to keep. They met the quota and handed it in to the central government and produced extra for themselves. Did they produce ten percent more you may ask? Did they produce double. They produced five times as much. Astonishingly so. Five times as much. One could argue. One could debate for eternity for reasons why this occurs. We could meddle and mess and fiddle and discuss. The truth remains. We are selfish creatures. And that is not a bad thing as such. The selfishness leads to development of new technologies. It leads to new discoveries. It leads to much greater innovation. It leads to extra consumption and chaos at times, but it leads to more having a more gratifying life.

Some systems will suit you personally. You have preferences hardwired into the fibre of your being which may be conducive with the system you are bound up in. Your preferences might however be ill-disposed towards the economic political system in your region. The least worst system is what we can strive towards. The least worst system is the best, best for the most number of people. Extreme ideologies lie at the bottom of the chasm, far below the least worst. Some want maximum economic efficiency.

They believe disabled people, certain ethnic groups, the workshy and roaming folk have little utility. Those with little utility are unwanted, undesirable and best got rid of. Equally extreme are those that support community-based doctrines. They selectively choose who to help. They want people to conform. They do not like wealth passed down the generations. They do not want some people earning significantly more than others. They do not believe in personal freedoms. They most certainly do not have a live and let live attitude. They interfere with your affairs, intrusively. These sets of people sit side by side at the bottom of the chasm with those that seek to rid the nation of less desirable people. Socialism. Community focused doctrines. Ideologies that put utility first and foremost. All of these are good for a small number of people but not at all good for the rest.

There will always be groups that push for change. They want change that suits them. They want to enforce that change on those that are largely happy with the way things are. They demand change in a rude, obnoxious way. They have little evidence that can show that any of the changes they want to make will improve things for most. Their ideas are based on obscure beliefs. Inconsiderate selfishness. They do not consider what other people prefer. Their demand for change is done with menaces. The fungal evil that has gradually eked within, amongst us.

The best systems have the least corruption, the most freedom, the most opportunity. A balance is stuck between helping others though sharing the spoils of our individual labour and enabling the individual to shine. It is a difficult balance to achieve, lots will always complain. Many will be pleased to see the level of tax rise, so long as those tax increases are only placed on those richer than they are.

Wealth is relative. If a taxi driver who used to charge three pieces of silver for a typical trip came into a fortune and had tens of thousands of pieces of silver stored 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 thirty pieces of silver to make it worthwhile. If we all had lots 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. Wealth only counts if you have more than other and can therefore afford to offload all the menial jobs to those willing to be paid comparatively small sums.

Economic complexities

Economies are complex. One factor influences another. The weather affects the harvest. The mines never produce the same

volume of useful matter each year. Fashions change. Demand changes. Supply runs dry, supply exceeds demand. Those that make economic forecasts, guess. Those that produce economic theories are sometimes overly optimistic, sometimes misinformed and sometimes hoping that they can influence the behaviour of others. Many economic theories can work in practice, but only for so long.

Lucy is waiting for the metal fabricator to finish making the tools before she can start work. The metal fabricator is waiting for some metal to arrive from the mill. The mill is short of money as they have paid the metal miner in advance but has yet to receive the iron ore. The mill has asked the coking coal provider to deliver some coking coal. One day he will use electricity to heat the iron, but for now, coke is used. It is reliable and cheap anyway. The coking coal provider wants payment on delivery and the mill is in what we call a cash flow situation. The mill is waiting on payments from the metal fabricator, has paid for the ore and has work in progress. Things are in a bit of a jam. There are delays to proceedings. The wholesaler has amassed a bundle of promissory notes but has not had time to pay his debt to the dependable grifter nor settle the invoice from the metal fabricator. Work is being held up by payment issues.

If there were more promissory notes available there would be fewer financial jams. More money would flow. As money flows quicker, more people get more done. However, the more of something, the less it is worth. That applies to money as it does to apples, tools, gold and false teeth. If there is a surplus of apples, people lower the price. If a false teeth maker makes false teeth more cheaply by utilising new false teeth manufacturing processes, he can lower the price to gain more sales, competing with the other false teeth makers. Prices can come down as processes improve.

An economy can have extra money introduced to help reduce the jams, aid spending, aid buying, aiding the flow of goods and services. A magic trick that pulls a rabbit out of the hat. A rabbit with very large teeth. Teeth that bite the poor the most. Why. The rich gain from asset appreciation, the poor see what little that have dwindle and their salary becomes less meaningful. To simplify the argument, I will like you to consider a campfire. When the fire is less of a fire and more akin to a little glow with a dismal wispy plume of smoke slowly filling the air, one can put a set of bellows to work. Pump in the air, pump it a while, and the fire takes hold. Pump it too much and you have a problem. You run out of wood. Fast. To keep the fire going one must obtain more wood. One must wait for trees to grow, for people to chop the

wood, season the wood and bring it to you. This takes time. A new jam. A different jam, a time-based jam.

The shepherd has fifty sheep in his flock. He has written the number down in a ledger. It is the same ledger in principle to the ledger that the dependable grifter uses. The dependable grifter can change an entry from fifty to five hundred by adding a zero. So can the shepherd. When the ledger has been changed to show that there are now five hundred sheep in the field, are there five hundred sheep in the field? To increase the number of sheep in reality, we must encourage the ewes to have lambs. This takes time. We can perform magic tricks with money that we can't with production. Magic is sleight of hand, smoke and mirrors – a trick of some sort. As is financial magic. Financial magic tricks do not instantly boost the number of sheep in a field. Financial magic tricks can boost the fire in an economy, make it glow brighter for a short while. There is a however a price to pay soon afterwards.

No amount of money will make trees appear overnight. No amount of printed money will increase the number of sheep you have overnight. If you use the printed money to buy trees and sheep from another country, the trick fails. Your currency buys less and less as more money is created. The nation you trade with will demand more money for each sheep.

Grafting and grifting

Lucy wants to live fulfilled, joyously, graciously. She wants to work hard but not work hard for the entirety of her life. She wants to accumulate assets and use those assets to reduce the amount she works when she is older. Older but not too old to explore and make use of the free time. This dream can come to fruition if she makes a good plan and executes the plan well. This is Lucy's dream. It rankles with those that favour socialist, community-based doctrines. To them it is a repugnant idea. They do not believe that one should be able to accumulate wealth by not earning it all through hard labour. The dependable grifter is the biggest sinner of them all, according to those with socialist principles. His line of work is not classed as work but gaining from unearned income. He is exploiting a system, taking advantage of those who do the day-to-day graft. Socialists want you to graft not grift. Grifting is working on the sidelines of the community, often honestly dependably and usefully. A magician may perform tricks to swindle the public. They draw you in to play money games that you can never win. Sleight of hand, cheating. That is a pure form of grifting. Dependable banking has a grifting undertone despite it greasing the wheels of the economy thereby making the economy-machine work better.

Lucy cares little for the socialists dream and feels she deserves to be free as the birds and bees. No one tells them what to do. Some

animals work in unison, dolphins will corral fish, benefitting all concerned. All bar the fish of course. However, we apes are very good at working in unison for the benefit of many. A union works to stymie excess profiteering but will also stymie production and progress. Unison implies working for shared rewards.

Lucy asked people what they thought about her venture but quickly shifted from endless talk into endless action. She knows many around her that talked about starting a business but never started. They did talk a lot about what they were going to do but never got on with it. Sometimes you do not know what the problems will be until you are well underway. A few small mistakes, a big mistake here and there is fine. The biggest mistake one can make is endlessly procrastinating.

Lucy will be given twenty pieces of silver when the fence work is complete. She will pay ten for the wood. She will pay ten for the tools, but they can be used on other jobs afterwards. She decides to do something rather sensible. She enlists the help of Clare. It is rare of Clare to get her hands dirty as she is a member of the bourgeois set, but for this one-off job Clare will help. Clare will be given three pieces of silver. Lucy will ensure that Clare does at least half of the work. Ignoring the cost of the tools, Lucy is set to have six pieces of silver left over once the job is complete. The dependable grifter gets one, Lucy six, Clare three. Everyone is reasonably happy. Lucy will set aside two pieces of silver to pay down the cost of the tools and save to buy more later. Lucy is doing two very important things. She is calculating her costs. She is making a note of them. She is studying the profits. She is not afraid to view her accounts. Lucy sees it as just numbers. She doesn't get overly emotional about it. One needs to feel emotions, that is what being human is all about, but too emotional about numbers that relate to something imaginary, money, is unhelpful. The more she faced it, the easier it was to deal with it. Lucy is also getting others to do a lot of the hard work. The more she does that, the better. Better for Lucy. Better for the wider community in the long run.

A socialist will not allow Lucy to profit from the labours of others. The reasons why they will not allow people to profit from the labour of others is a mystery. They do attempt to explain why in books they write. The books are fine to read as works of fiction. Anyone that enjoys excuses and obfuscation revel in them. Semi-truths merged within riddles. Each book contains a romantic happy ending, so they give people hope and belief. False hope and false promises. Socialists are known for talking a lot without ever answering a question.

Shirts are typically sold for 4 pieces of silver. However, Timothy Pierre Whitecoat adds a badge to his shirts, styles them a little

differently by changing the cuts to the cloth and sells them for 15 pieces of silver. His shirts use roughly the same amount of cotton and takes roughly the same amount of time to manufacture as ones sold for 4 pieces of silver. The only tangible difference is fashion and prestige. Socialists will outlaw Timothy and his fancy shirt selling scheme. The socialists do not believe in frivolity. All shirts will be made to look the same. Function matters, form does not. Making something look better is unnecessary and capitalist in ideology. If it works, why fix it, why improve it. Charging more for something that has become more desirable is unearned income, no different to using assets to earn money. All shirt makers, shirt vendors and shirt distributors should earn the same amount. No ifs, no buts. Socialism is about empathetic community co-operation.

Lucy has done the deed, built the fence and received the bag of silver. She is no fool. She has paid everyone she owes. She has six silver coins deposited with the dependable banker. She will not buy new carpets for her house. Nor will she replace her sink in the kitchen despite it being very old. She will not swallow a gallon of beer nor smoke dried leaves. She will not have an adventurous trip abroad. Not this year. Maybe in a few years' time. Instead, she will pay some of the loan off and keep the rest for the next job. Lucy is rare in this neck of the woods. Most spend what they earn soon after being paid. They dare not save for personal financial progress. To become wealthy, one must earn more than they spend. They must study their accounts meticulously and get others to do the bulk of the hard work.

Lucy asked Clare to lay the fence posts out. She wants each one put near where they will stand. Clare ignores this request and begins digging the first hole. Clare prefers to fetch one post at a time after each hole is dug. Lucy prefers to have all the fence posts set out first. Does it matter? Not really. Our ways differ. Those ways can sometimes achieve better results. Those ways may save a little money. Those ways may simply be the way we prefer things to be done. Some ways are safer. Lucy understands that some ways are near enough as good as her ways. If your way of doing a job takes a few minutes longer, it doesn't matter. Not here in the fence erecting business. Lucy accepts that people she employs might do things a little differently but will get the job done nevertheless. Lucy will still earn quite a lot from other people's hard work. They will not work as keenly as her. They will not strive to make the business as fantastic as she, but they will, in general, be reliable and courteous towards the customers. Across the meadow, along the lane, behind the mountain works François. Alone. No one will work with him. He controls people, micro-manages them. He insists that every job is carried out in a very particular way. Lucy becomes rich, François not at all.

Some people are quicker at doing certain tasks than others. Some are brighter than others. Some are more creative. Some are in a world of their own. Controlling every move a fence post erector makes, may be counter productive, but in other businesses, managers can change a small thing and the change in output can be astonishing. I have increased production by a factor of three. From seven an hour to over twenty by simply re-organising who does what. Managers will change what their staff are doing. Staff watch the clock whilst managers watch what happens as the clock hands roll around. Small changes could be made. Changes that are obvious. The problems are clear to see. You might assume the staff would see what could be changed and make the changes. However, they rarely do. Managers are grifters in the eyes of the socialists, but they can make incredible changes to organisations. They are paid their weight in gold, because they are often worth more than their weight in gold.

A job is a job, is it not. It is when it is profitable. It is not so much a job but a labour of love when not financially profitable. I had a realisation during my business journey. I was buying broken clocks. I repaired them. I sold them. Each clock was sold for one piece of silver more than I paid for them. I realised that this was not a good thing to carry on doing. Instead of repairing small clocks I decided that I shall repair radio equipment instead. I can fix a radio in the same amount of time as I can repair a clock. I can earn seven pieces of silver for each radio that I repaired and sold. I can earn seven times the amount of money in the same space of time. I repeat what I said earlier. Study your accounts and you will notice things like this in your business. I would only repair clocks if it was a means to an end. Maybe to draw customers into my shop perhaps, so that I can sell them other things too.

One of the reasons Lucy was keen to go into the fence erecting business was because she enjoys working outdoors, enjoys physical graft. As she employs more people, she will spend less time outdoors and more time dealing with fraud, tax returns, advertising, dealing with miss-deliveries, personnel matters and getting technology to work as desired. I semi-retired quite early so there was a payoff for all those years of commitment. The stress of running a business 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.

The dependable grifter will invariably put his interests ahead of those he is lending to. That is not simply being selfish. He is after all lending money that is not all his. He is lending money that other people have stored with him. If his business fails, lots will

lose lots of their hard-earned pieces of silver. He needs to maintain confidence in who he lends to. Confidence is money. If he suspects a business is not making enough profits to cover costs, including the cost of money borrowed, then he may act before the situation gets worse. He may ask the business to stop trading and salvage what he can. Some businesses seem to be profitable when they are not. Some businesses seem to be loss making when they are simply at the bottom of a business cycle. Each person who analyses the accounts will come to a different conclusion. Different but roughly the same conclusion in some cases. Different but markedly different conclusion in other cases. Some believe that there will be an uptick in tool sales next year. Others feel differently. What you believe will happen in the future will dictate what sales you expect the tool maker to make. The more optimistic, the more confidence you will have in the tool maker. The more confidence you have, the happier you are to invest in his business. Confidence all round.

Crime

It is quite rare for someone to steal something because they are without food. Most theft is to satisfy greed. Making a copy of your work is stealing. I could copy your private pictures and show them to who I like. You still have the pictures; nothing is lost. However, taking something without permission is theft. In any nation where businesses are taxed, people that steal, steal from everyone. The tool maker has had much of his stock taken. He is very annoyed. People are sympathetic. Sympathy is wonderful but helps very little. He deducts his losses from his tax account. He pays significantly less tax in that period. The other tax payers will have to make up the difference or the government will have less to spend. When you see someone stealing from a shop, they are taking from both the shop and you. You will, one way or another, pay more tax or receive less in the way of government support.

The tool maker will waste time dealing with the robbery. Time that he could have used making tools. He will revamp the security of his warehouse, costing more time and money. Crime is one of the biggest drains on an economy. We spend vast sums on policing, prisons, anti-theft devices, security locks, immobilisers, safes and so on. We could spend that money on so many other things that would make our society immensely better. Better for all. Nations could be, between ten percent and thirty percent, richer if crime were attenuated.

Prisons are very cheap. Prisons can be very effective. Murder rates have plummeted where leaders have imprisoned the bulk of the violent criminals. Less crime, more tax revenue. The greater the tax revenue, the more affordable prisons become. One may spend ten pieces of silver each month keeping someone inside a

prison. That may seem expensive. However, if we factor in the cost of supporting them outside of prison, factor in the reduced damage, and factor in the increase in tax revenue, it is money very well spent.

In a nation with a high crime rate, spending ten pieces of silver on crime attenuation will lead to thirty pieces of extra tax revenue.

Assets

Lucy kept a close eye on her accounts. She enlisted the help of many others to do the bulk of the hard work and profited from it. She trained many young people. Lots that worked for her earned a good living. Her employees preferred to be paid a guaranteed amount and not be bothered by immense responsibility. Lucy grew her business organically, re-investing most of the profits. She made a name for herself. She handed vast sums to the tax collectors for them to distribute for the common good. She became wealthy. Was her wealth measured by the pile of promissory notes issued by the dependable banker? She didn't store her wealth in gold and silver, she only holds a little silver and gold to run the business. She employed many craftsmen to build her a decent house. She owned the business. If one were to add up the value of all her assets they would arrive at a figure of 10,000 pieces of silver.

My shot misses. I try again. I aim the same amount in front of the target. My shot misses again. No different the third time. I did not try aiming a little further forward nor a little further back. I was doing the same thing over and over expecting a different result. That is insanity. Socialism has failed and failed and failed. It has been tried in slightly different forms and still failed. Knowing that socialism always fails, and that it will be insanity to try and impose socialism on people that really didn't want it, the socialists took over. Forcefully. Free speech was abandoned. Consistent messaging was prevalent. Promises were made. The wealthy are to be brought down. Lucy is bad. Socialists are good, morally superior people.

Lucy forfeited her house. She tried in vain to sell it for 4000 pieces of silver. She would have sold it easily at that price before the socialists went on their economic rampage. There is a wealth tax now. The householders must pay ten percent of the value of the house each year. Some advised against such a high level, but these socialists have promised reform. The house was sold at auction. It fetched 200 pieces of silver. The business went into state ownership. The little gold Lucy had was given a haircut. Thirty percent was taken by the government. The value of Lucy's wealth tumbled from ten thousand pieces of silver to less than five hundred, overnight. Wealth is illusionary. People are richer than others. However, assets are only worth what they can be

sold for. Lucy was paying three hundred pieces of silver in tax each year. Now she will pay none. The business will provide some income for the nation, but the workers work less enthusiastically now. Less fences are put up. The sheep are all killed anyway as food ran short, so fences are not needed anymore.

The first year of the socialist revolution is fantastic. The streets are full of joy and jubilation. The wealth is distributed mainly to the party members, but some is handed to lowly comrades. By the second year, the jubilation has faded grey. Things plod along uncomfortably. Many people that protested are put in prisons. The schools train children, rather than educate them. They train them to be good moral socialist citizens. Free thinking is discouraged. Copy, copy, copy is the mantra. Where once a farm produced food to feed three hundred, it barely feeds seventy people now. Choice is gone. The range of foods, clothes and even haircuts are restricted. Bank accounts have haircuts as often as people have the hair on their head cut. A percentage is taken from the amount you have in your account. People stop saving. On the bright side, looking at it in a more positive light, the socialists did take one thing from capitalism. Namely, get others to do the hard work. The non-party member slog in the fields whilst those in charge live in a dream home with a sea view, kitchen cupboards stocked with food that the rest are restricted from having. The party members enjoy the finer things. They love art. They like to share the art. They put it on display for all to enjoy and revere. They have statues of their leaders built, fifty times the height of the comrades that built them. They need to be seen from afar and be imposing.

Socialism is selfishness personified. Power, control and the desire to be needed. The aim of socialism is to restrict and contain. To stop. To hinder. To damage the core of what human life can be. You the comrade are akin to a chicken. Fed, housed and exploited for four or five eggs per week. You shall not fly and battle the winds. You shall not explore far. You will be kept in check, kept near the coop. You will not be allowed to see what you can do. The leaders live a rewarding life. They sort the challenges that come their way. That is enjoyable. Solving problems is rewarding. That same opportunity to feel those rewards is taken from the lowly. That is selfishness personified. All in the name of principle. Socialist principles are evil dressed up in fancy clothes, tied together by lies and deceit. Semi-truths and dogma.

The socialists enjoy their work. They feel rewarded when they make changes. Happy that they count. They insist that retarded people do not work at all. They may be allowed to work in some voluntary fashion so long as they are not paid. They must not be paid less than the faster folk. They can't work as fast as the faster

folk, so retarded people are worth zero and most certainly not half what a fast person can take home each day. It doesn't matter how much a retarded person complains about being left out. They are worth nothing, not three quarters of the pay, not a single fraction of a silver piece less than the rest. You either make the grade or live a dejected disappointed dull life. Selfishness personified, socialism. Community-ism.

Lending

The dependable banker lies too, a little. He has one hundred pieces of gold stored. He initially wrote one hundred promissory notes in respect of them. He prints ten more and lent them to Lucy. He is lying about the amount of silver he has per note issued. Upon issuing more promissory notes, more money is in the system. The value of that money drops. More money is needed to purchase things. With all things being equal, prices of goods and services rise. The spending power of each promissory note falls. Inflation sets in. A little inflation greases the engine, a lot is troublesome.

Lucy gave some of her notes to the tool maker in exchange for the spade and saw. The tool maker gave them to the mill owner who returned them to the dependable banker. The dependable banker is paying interest on the equivalent of one hundred and ten pieces of silver. He is also earning interest on the equivalent of one hundred and ten pieces of silver. The interest he pays out is less than the interest he charges on loans. He lives off the difference between the two. All is well. Until somebody dies, absconds or goes out of business and fails to repay what they borrowed. Any natural disaster, war, plague or pestilence spells trouble for the dependable banker and those that hold their silver and gold with him. He needs an insurance policy.

Wealth is created and destroyed daily. Farmers create food wealth. Those that eat the food destroy the wealth. An artist can create wealth by painting a picture. The buyer destroys it when they rip it up and throw it away. The canvas and paint have a value, five pieces of silver. A completed picture has a value, fifteen pieces of silver. Ten pieces of economic value has been added to the canvas by the act of painting a picture on it. If the artist is admired, liked or is famous, a signature on the painting adds another ten pieces of silver to the canvas. Market value added. When the tool maker turns the iron into usable tools, the iron is worth more. Economical value added. If the tools are high quality and they gain a reputation for that high quality, the value added is significantly more. People will pay a premium for the brand of goods that they are buying.

The tool maker can sell fifty tools for five hundred pieces of silver to a wholesaler who splits the hundred into smaller parcels. The

wholesaler sells the tools in lots of fives for fifty-five pieces of silver. He gains one piece of silver on each tool he resells. That is market value added. The shopkeeper buys the tools from the wholesaler and sells them for fifteen pieces of silver each. If the shopkeeper displays them well, advertises them, markets them, he benefits from the market value added. Shopkeepers add market value rather than economic value. Transforming materials, adds economic value. Making something more desirable, adds market value to an item. One can do both. Each item that I repaired added to its economic value. Once repaired and ready to sell, I can gain additional value by marketing it in my store. I did the repairs whilst waiting for customers, rather than sitting idle.

Demand and supply changes. The desirability and usefulness of items change. The weather is rarely constant. Goods can be held up in transit. There are thousands of factors that dictate the price of something at any given moment. Markets do not act rationally, nor predictably. Chaos dominates. The greater the incentive to work, the more people produce. Reliable economic projections are difficult to make especially when political policies are changed. More forecasters get it wildly wrong than get it right, yet people are prepared to place faith in economic projections. We can be right but for the wrong reason, but will take credit for our projections nevertheless.

Creating money

The dependable grifter could live a fine life, paying his way by printing endless promissory notes. Some to exchange for food for his family. Yet more to pay labourers to build him a home. Not satisfied with that, he could get a very large printing press that can make sufficient notes to be handed over in exchange for a medium sized aeroplane. If someone fails to repay a loan, he simply deletes the entry from the ledger and prints some more promissory notes. The agreement to pay a premium on gold and silver stored with him is honoured, with newly printed promissory notes. Upon doing so the price of bananas go up as does the price of tools and fence posts.

Governments have often printed money, created money electronically, and seen the price of all goods and services rise to compensate. There is no free lunch. At first the economy booms as more money is available, but it then runs into trouble. There is no free lunch. Upon seeing the price of bananas rise alarmingly, those with silver stored with the dependable grifter will request their silver back. There will be a run on the bank. Protests start. The poor get hammered the most. The price of assets rise. The rich own the most assets. The rich do well. The poor get hammered. Their wages fall. The number of bananas that they

could buy per day of work goes down. House prices rise. The price of land goes up. The rich own land and property. Their wealth increases in monetary terms.

The dependable grifter is not the only dependable grifter in town. There are others doing the same thing. They compete with each other. One bank offers eleven pieces of silver interest each year on a hundred pieces of silver stored. That compares favourably with those offering ten. Rather than charging twenty pieces of silver interest on loans, some offer the same service for eighteen. When a bank lends all the money they have, they bring their rate back in line with all the other banks. Bankers can use interest rates as a way to attract deposits or increase lending according to how much they have on loan or on deposit.

A buyer and seller may use the same bank. An item can change hands, and the payment takes the form of the bank ledger showing a different person being entitled to the silver. If the buyer and seller use different banks, a transfer between banks takes place. One bank may request the transfer be made in silver or a note is made of who owes what to who. Trust is vital. Dependability is vital. Confidence in the other bank is vital. If there is a suspicion that a bank is printing too many notes over and above the number of silver tokens in their possession, that faith can be tested. If the tally of who owes what to who is backed by dependable customers taking out loans, then things will be fine. If there is fear of customers defaulting, banks will insist on silver transfers rather than promises. Money is trust and confidence.

As more gold is dug from the earth, more money can be created in lieu of it, but a bank can create money at any time, usually by lending. However, the lending must have a security tied to it - a credible, quality asset. If one fails to repay the loan, the bank takes possession of the asset. Deciding what is credible and what is quality is open to interpretation. A newly built house, where demand for houses is strong would be labelled a quality asset. A business with strong prospects can be viewed as an equally valid quality asset. The criterium for what counts as quality and credible is based on historical performance. No bank will create money ad infinitum and stay in business. Gold is unearthed, houses are built from scratch, business come into being. This is money creation. Once those assets enter existence, money can be created to match this new wealth.

Systems emerge where promissory notes have no association with gold and silver. Some are government-controlled others are free market. Free market promissory notes represent something abstract beyond reason. The trust is entirely based on the name, how widely that name is known, and who supports the name. A

system that is not associated with credible, quality assets, relies on wagers endlessly fed into it. A hierarchy forms. Those at the top of the hierarchy are those that wagered early. Those cashing out profitably rely on others taking losses. The fools join in too late, the clever ones join early, but the cleverest of all are those that create the system. They gain from free wagers that are built into the system at the start. Some hierarchies promise you a place on a list. As more join, the list grows, and you eventually reach a point where some are paid handsomely for their gamble. Some will win the bet, most will not. No wealth is being created. There is no economic value added. There is not much genuine market value added. Any gains are at the expense of others that lose. There will be a free lunch for the lucky few. The rest have hope, but that fades.

The majority of all wealth is held in the form of property, infrastructure, data, commodities and a slew of other tangible assets. Only a little of the wealth upon the globe is held in the form of promissory notes, whether that takes the form of electronic data entries in a ledger or in printed physical form. Wealth is assets, promissory notes are the tool used to transfer and trade assets. The quoted price of an asset indicates the price at which the last trade took place. It does not indicate how much you are guaranteed to get for your asset. It may be a lot higher or a lot lower depending on the size of the asset sale and who is prepared to buy and sell at any given moment.

The dependable banker's bonds pay out a bi-annual coupon. He honours the holder five pieces of silver every six months. The bonds were initially sold for one hundred pieces of silver. If demand for the bonds increase, people will offer more than one hundred pieces of silver for them. They may offer one hundred and eleven. The interest rate now drops to around nine percent, from ten percent. You pay one hundred and ten for the bond but still get ten silver pieces as a coupon. That may be still attractive to lots of people. The bond value has inflated, akin to more air being forced into a balloon. With a thousand bonds in circulation there is now an extra eleven thousand pieces of silver wrapped up in them. When someone sells a bond, money is drawn from the value of all the bonds in circulation, a little from each. The price of the bond falls a little to compensate for the money drawn out. The intrinsic value of each bond is always one hundred pieces of silver irrespective of the current market spot price. The price correlates closely with sentiment; confidence in the future performance of an asset. Sentiment is often unreliable and thus some can profit from predicting the change in sentiment.

Those that store their wealth in currency rarely do as well as those that store their wealth in a range of physical assets. Currency

tokens, promissory notes, bonds have no intrinsic value. Metals, foodstuffs, buildings, gems etc appear to have intrinsic value attached. They have utility and a tradable worth. Context is all. A silver coin is useless in the desert. Water becomes valuable to the thirsty. Wealth is not only found in physical assets. Know-how is wealth too. Knowing what works through years of refining a method is an asset to the holder of that know-how. Humankind has built roads, railways, airports, pipelines etc that underpin the wealth of a nation. Whilst the food is grown, processed and then eaten, the wealth made and destroyed, some progress is made with infrastructure development.

I pick apples from my tree. I have gained via economical value added, the conversion of sunlight, gases and minerals into an edible product. I sell hundreds to a wholesaler who splits into lots and sells them to small vendors. The vendors sell the apples, one by one, to hungry people. The apple merchants gain from market value added. The person eating the apple destroys the wealth contained within it. However, they derive energy and sustenance to work and live. This is economic flow. Along the way, the economic flow can lead to more overall wealth, if those consuming food and resources build, create or enhance the environment. We can use what we build. What we build has a value attached. What we build makes life more enjoyable, safer, more comfortable and more pleasant. The structures held within a nation is its wealth. Water pipes which provide you water to shower with, is just one of many such things. Your individual contribution can be positive or negative according to how much you add or take away from the nation's structures and capabilities. Then you die and your burial/burn-up becomes an economic cost.

Some assets are inert or underused. A large dwelling with a single occupant is an underused asset. Ten people could comfortably reside in it. Some well-maintained roads have low traffic passing on them. Asset utilisation dictates economic flow and thereby the volume of potential economic value-added activity that can be achieved. A set of people living in cramped quarters may be gladdened to find themselves with more space but the increase in space may have no effect on their productivity. Those living in cramped conditions have an incentive to improve their lot. That incentive will push them to work hard, study hard and find the will to progress. Judgments can be made based on principles, morality or economic hard truths. A fairer world is fairer for some and much less so for others.

We strive for fairness by ignoring what happens in other nations. We might insist on safe practices in the workplace, fairness in pay and a nice work life balance. We push for this whilst buying things

from other nations that pay no attention to safety, are paid miserable amounts for what they do and toil from dawn 'til dusk. Socialism is only to be in my backyard – the rest can go to hell.

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. There will always be a hard-core bulk of individuals who have a low economic peasant status, relative to a minor few who will have significantly more. That applies in all systems, all societies, in capitalist nations and socialist ones.

What has it got to do with you? Why are you interfering. What right do you have to interfere with other people's affairs. Do you complain that your next-door neighbour is married to someone far more attractive than your husband. Do you complain that other peoples' children can run faster and further than yours. Are you envious of your friend's artwork. Should they be forced to use that talent to paint the ceilings in the civic halls. How do you decide what should be taxed and what should not. What is the basis for your determination. Can your neighbour grow vegetables on his plot of land and feed them to his family? Should they hand most of them out to others instead. They tend their garden in their free time whilst you sunbathe, yet you want them to feed all and sundry whilst you choose to relax.

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 in the operating theatre if it 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.

A pinch of carbon can be worth next to nothing or quite a lot. It all depends on one key fact. If you do not know this key fact you

should not be reading a book like this. You should return to school and pay attention this time around. The fact; structure. When structured in a certain way, carbon might be worth more in the love domain than the money domain depending on who you present it to. The structure of atoms dictates value.

Timothy spoke out against the union of socialist workers group. That was a mistake. A murmur to himself would have got it off his chest without alerting the union members. What he said was akin to blasphemy. An arrest warrant for Timothy has been issued. Anyone that knows his whereabouts must report it immediately. Much of the populace side with Timothy, they largely agree with what he said. Few are willing to notify the union if they see him. As the weeks pass, and Timothy is yet to be located, a reward is offered. Whilst many will agree with what Timothy has done, a financial bounty is more agreeable. The reward is equivalent to one week's wages. The reward works instantly. Unless Timothy is immensely revered, people will side with money. Selfishness wins.

Money makes money, new furniture does not. 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. Think of what service/business/product you are going to offer. Put a plan in place. Implement it. That is all it takes. 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 a thousand pieces of silver a month and make half that, that it is better than aiming to make one hundred 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?

Lucy knew there would be demand for what she does. However, why buy tools if those tools will only be used once. How many people want what we plan to sell? Can we sell a few prototypes first to gauge the level of demand. How much will it cost to make people aware of what we hope to sell.

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. 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.

Do you truly get more pleasure from work than play? What is all the work is for if you end up too old and worn out to enjoy it.

Some are not able to resist that extra deal, to make even more money which may be surplus to requirement in hindsight.

I am not in their shoes, I am not in their position however, I was once. I was poor once upon a time. To escape poverty, I had to make sacrifices. It fascinates me to see someone pawn an item at a rate of thirty percent per month. They borrow one hundred and pay thirty back the first month, then another thirty the second month. By month three they have near enough paid the same in interest as what they have borrowed. If they went without for three months, they would have ninety saved. There is no helping these people, they enjoy keeping bankers rich.

There are some oddities within the world we live in. Clare pays ten pieces of silver to have her hair washed and trimmed. Had she visited another country, she could have had the exact same hair wash and trim for one piece of silver. The exact same service for one tenth of the price. Nations manipulate the economic system to create a disparity. All nations have the ability to manipulate their economic system to compete and reduce the disparity. Many do. Eliminate corruption, allow free enterprise, ensure property rights are respected, attenuate crime, allow the power of the free market to flourish, coax the idle into playing their part.

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. Many emergencies can be fixed with money. Having money put aside for such occasions helps us worry a lot less. All one need do is save a tiny amount each week and build an emergency fund. Even those in relative poverty can save a little.

Whatever you build, create, collect or hoard, you are only the temporary custodian of things. It all gets left behind when we go. Wealth, a fantastic family life, a beautiful partner, time, health. What would you swap. 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 had the money, I would have had less time for fun.

Pyramids

“Dig a hole and chuck me in it.” Say those that do not want 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 fire of sorts or a burial. Unless the fire is upon a pile of wood and set to sea, the bones are ground down by stone balls until it is fine and uniform, then tipped into an urn. Those not burnt have their stiffened corpse placed below the surface of the ground. A pauper’s spot is marked by a wooden cross. A person with an image to maintain will have a headstone commissioned. The very wealthy might elect to be placed inside a large tomb. These solid stone funeral accoutrements become home to lichen. Despite being made of seemingly stern stuff, they degrade as the years pass. The engraved letters become barely readable. Headstones gradually tilt, sinking into the earth until one day they fall over completely - with or without a kick from a bored youth. 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 seems too ordinary, there are ever more ingenious ways to dispose of people. Your degraded self can be used by medical students who may select a part to chop out and immerse in vinegar. A bit of you can be put on display – used as an example of what happens when organs become diseased. 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.

Striving to create a legacy is one of the higher-level drives that sits upon the basic ones, curiosity, selfishness, and reward. Some aspire for greatness. Some want to make sure their family does well, long into the future. If we build something, craft something perhaps we will be remembered. We could be a part of something grand that alters the way the world works. Possibly making it more efficient more sustainable, more practical, more something. We can be credited for our contribution. Our life will count for something. That is the hope. 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.

Have you strived to achieve something, maybe, in the art world, the science world, the world of knowledge. Many expect great acclaim or at least a little recognition but alas, fall short. Their contribution is represented by a single flower in a meadow that spans out as far as the eyes can see. Lost, barely noticeable amongst the many. 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. People console themselves with the thought that they got pleasure from the compiling and composing 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.

The term, worldwide acclaim, is an exaggeration. It is very, very rare to get to a point where a sizable percentage of the world population recognise you. Vast numbers pay attention to what is going on in their village and little else. Rather than being broadly recognised, people become noteworthy within closed circles, namely by other people involved in the same field, in the same business. If you double the number of famous people, you halve their individual value. Less is more. Galleries have art works placed on every wall and in every alcove. Behind the scenes lie troves of other works that are stored because there is no space to show them all. Fifty 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 them, lest we include the poor family members who bore the brunt of being fed periodic updates 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 should you do if you seek notoriety and be renown but 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. You accept that you will not be remembered in a thousand years' time so temporary fame is a decent compromise. 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.

There are sports where all the top players are superstars. Yet in different sports, equally talented people are quite the opposite; few outside the sport know about them. 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. They enjoy the journey to the top but when they make it, rather than joy and satisfaction they find themselves feeling rather empty.

Many strive to become a very-important-person as this allows them to jump the queues and get the most comfortable vantage points. They disregard the idea of giving each and every person equal validity. 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 pressed people on occasion 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.

Fame is enticing. With fame, your words carry more weight. People take heed of what you do. People are much more curious about the famous than the not so famous. Fame sets a starting seed in our heads that we build on, willing us to find out more about the person. Where the famous is the leader, it helps to have knowledge about them.

Two difficulties: Defining what art is. Understanding why some artists gain more prominence than others. Anything can be art if someone says it is. On the second difficulty, success is not always dependant on the level of craftsmanship. Talent helps, perseverance and belief helps too. A slight air of novelty which captures the imagination sets some apart. The first person to stake the claim, the initial innovator is likely to be acknowledged in the history books. 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. We see some take centre stage and think it is a wasted opportunity to do so much more with the attention that they are receiving. However, in most cases someone makes the news, we talk about them for a short while, then move on to the next topic of conversation.

You

To keep your notoriety alive and well, get self-portraits 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. Rather than place your portrait at eye level, place it high up so that your image is bearing down on every passing stranger.

If your pictures are not getting sufficient attention, add a well-known figure smiling alongside you. Remember, the person that cares the most about self-portraits, is the person in the frame. If the images you create happen 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 pictures of ourselves than viewing pictures curated by others. 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 little bit of originality. Others will be on the lookout to find fault. To climb, to gain ground, one must push downwards. We say nasty things about others to slow their ascent. Alternatively, we can take credit for any help we give. Once again it is you that can feed off the spoils.

You fantasise that people will talk about you a lot and speak 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 and the unfairness of it all. Many do have a caring and compassionate nature. A façade of selfless, inclusive, non-discriminatory behaviour. Behind the façade, the true aim; do unto others such that it makes me look good, decent and morally righteous.

The wish to have people thinking highly of us starts with making a good first impression. Then maintaining the image. Our image dictates how we are treated, but some may worry too much about how they present themselves. Most are focusing more on their own looks than that of others. Comments can play on our mind. Needlessly perhaps. It is you that remembers the comments; you that mithers over what others think. Others are worrying about themselves the most.

On the one hand we can develop an asset on the other hand we can waste a lot of time working on people. In the moment, a joyous encounter is something to treasure no matter where it leads, no matter whether you see the person again. We give people comfort, we listen to their dull stories, we help them. At the time it seemed worthwhile. We felt the reward. However, most we don't see anymore, people that we wanted to impress, people that we took the trouble to explain things to, people that we pacified. Some are dead. Some of these people do pop into my thoughts occasionally. Not every day, not once a week, but usually when a trigger brings back a memory. All that effort keeping up appearances helped at the time but so much of what did seems irrelevant looking back. We cared at the time. Now we

see new people frequenting the places we used to spend so much time at. New looks, new fashions, and new things in place of what once was.

People are lured by the logo/emblem sewn onto clothing. It can be a symbol of quality. However, corporations want the foolish to be unpaid walking advertisements. They should be giving the clothes away for free as people are promoting their products, instead people are paying a premium for them. Madness. If you want to feel above others but not famous in anyway, devise a dress code that sets you apart. People will know that you belong to a certain group. You will not become superior in any tangible way, but people will consider you to be a snide, aloof, bombastic pretender.

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. When photographs of missing people are plastered on a wall, certain ones catch people's 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 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.

With or without you

People hope that their loved ones will be fine, financially, after their demise. Wills are drawn up in the hope that there are no 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 amount of 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. 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.

The names of those that made key discoveries scar the history books. We believe that if it wasn't for a particular individual, then we wouldn't have certain inventions today. Whilst certain individuals provided the guiding force, 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. Whilst it was evident that poverty was abound, I am not sure a sales tactic such as that is commendable. A fellow traveller asked my why poverty was abound given that the government receives so much from the use of the shipping canal. Millions of pieces of silver a day. I told them that with tens of millions of people here, that is a fraction of one piece of silver each per person – enough for one 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. An ultra-rich soul could divide their fortune amongst the poor. A billion pieces of silver shared amongst a billion of those with their hands held out is one piece each. 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 lass 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. She was not even born when the issue became a focus of such media attention. This story has ingrained itself into

the collective memory. 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 someone 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 a few wanted to feel good about themselves. Kneejerk reactions without analysis and thought.

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

Look at me. Look at me. What am I at heart? What makes me, me. How do you prove you are you? You may have those that can vouch for you – pray they don't collude with others to deny all knowledge of you. Genetic fingerprints could be that of your twin. How do you prove you have no twin when records have been changed? You, whatever makes you, you, likes attention to some degree. Some like attention more than others. We may choose to ignore those that are constantly seeking attention. I often de-elevate them. However, must we always chastise attention seekers? 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, usually 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. We build a great atmosphere. Everyone is taking one another by the hand. Dancing bliss. Once the event is over, we just say toddle-pips and never see each other again. The time the place the opportunity.

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 rise 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. Your ideas superseded.

Positive thinking arises from negative introspection. Scepticism and cynicism lead to freedom.

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 used. 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.

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, a look at you very briefly, eyes shift down to the floor then away. I 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. We pay attention to them whilst 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. The way they ignore us can be exasperating. Few enjoy being stonewalled. Whilst we are bothered about these situations, these folks are oblivious to any hurt they cause. Such things shouldn't trouble us, but they do.

The person at the forefront of your mind may spend very little time thinking about you. 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 family and friends?

Proving oneself

Somebody told me that his father has missed out on so much. Not around to see what he has 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 a brown-haired girl. We danced together rather well. In between songs she disappeared. She vanished. Somebody very tall and somewhat thin came over to me and told me; I was good at scaring them off. He had an eye on her for a while and now had lost his chance. I was rather taken aback and 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 sore loser saw us together again? The journey towards not caring 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 say otherwise. Even if it is just that; wanting to make sure others 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?

Whilst talking to three pretty lovelies, 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 a 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 conversations becoming stale. 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 people prefer to keep 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. We shun bad people. We shun reasonably good people that are not quite as perfect as us. 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 consider 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.

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 attention. They seek sympathy to get attention. They ply their tradecraft drawing people into their 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. These are the ones we tried our best with but now shun.

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. We also have 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 all others. 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, 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 abhor 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. People like it; people copy. 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 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. Some advocate one style over another to profit via sponsorship. Some select a style hoping to be noticed and adulated for their superior choices. Either way, 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 spot an opportunity to take something from one field to use in another. The principle was already established. A tool used on farms adapted to solve a problem found in your science laboratory.

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 to 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. Officials stamp on those that do not conform. If objectors are not removed, the dissent will overwhelm official authority.

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. We follow through with our promises to maintain our reputation. A good reputation boosts our ego. Selfishness – preserving the value of the self.

The impact someone made in their community can be measured by the number of people attending their funeral service. People are impressed when they see lots turn up. Some worry that not such a large crowd will attend theirs. Whilst small crowds are seen when people outlive all their friends, some will have small crowds because they alienated most of their friends and family. Having a funeral before you die has many benefits. Not only can you bid farewell to those you love and loath, but you can also ensure the right songs are played.

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 you miss the chance to prove yourself before your loved ones go, you may resort to striving harder in the name of that someone you 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? What you are doing is for you, not for them.

A near miss. A wakeup call. Someone close to us dies. This can stir us into action. Stirred with a new sense of urgency. Live life to the full say some. This is all well and good, but we can find ourselves trying to fit too much in. We lose the joy of 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 reduces the 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? 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 enjoyment.

Universally admired

When I come across people that are popular and entertaining. People that draw others in. I ask myself, what does one need to do to be like that. What does it involve. 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. Add 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 in the popularity game as it is in so many other areas of life. You need to switch from being serious to being comical, depending upon the people you are with. Cheerful banter some of the time and absorbing discourse at other times.

The aspiration to be loved by all, is naïve. One should not be surprised when streams of negative comments roll in as your notoriety radiates. The more people know of you, the more exposed you will be 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, more disgruntlement.

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 his 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. Argumentative souls rile. Slating what others love doesn't help. 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 and acknowledge their large following. 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. Normal for one to know whereas you are lucky not to know. What we can do normally but sometimes can't manage. Normally fine, but today any upset causes distress. 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 some 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. They walk in the shadows leaving the spotlight to linger on others. 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 do not 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. That is via inclusion at the fringe or in the mainstream.

Kittens emerged, one by one. Five of them. It was exciting to watch. I was however, unsettled to see the mother push one 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 a reason to berate us. 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 will be made. Nobody can wave a magic wand, and all comes right. The desire to change is the most important thing. With that in place you will be on your way. The desire to change leads 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. How do you decide when a threshold is exceeded, exceeded enough to warrant a label. It can be contentious. 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. Who can truly grasp someone else's perspective and make an accurate comparison with their own. 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 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. I apologised. I could have left it knowing that I was going home shortly. 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. No humbleness nor any effort to remedy the situation. I see people play the long game. They believe they are in the right and wait for an impasse to come about to prove they are correct. This is all very well, but you can spend days or weeks with discomfort. Undoubtedly there are countless other tactics but facing someone, apologising if required, is so powerful. Forgetting 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. Life throws up millions of permutations. Many different situations arise. On this occasion do I need to be seen as in the right, does it matter that much?

I had a break-in. Stock was damaged by water that came in through the hole the thieves made 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 to go straight into a formal complaint with the authorities instead. 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. Some will believe your mental condition needs addressing others will feel that nothing needs rectifying. Each psychiatrist will gauge it differently. An experiment in madness detection was carried out to show how difficult it is to determine who is mad and who is deemed sane.

Students were sent to psychiatric hospitals. They were all told to complain of a knocking sound in their head. All were committed. All 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 was by admitting that they had a problem and accept treatment. Over the following days the students 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 couple 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.

We have mental issues that we ignore, issues we contend with, issues that bother us and things that stop us in our tracks. Mental conditions can be a nuisance or seriously debilitating in the same way that tinnitus can be a slight ringing in the ear or something that drives people to distraction. If the radio in your car is stuck on mute, you drive without music. If the windscreen wipers on our car jam, we avoid driving when it is raining. We do the equivalent with mental issues. To fix a car we must dismantle it to rectify the problem. We may have to tear our thoughts apart to get to the root of the problem. Once the root is addressed, we can reassemble the structure of our minds, putting it all back in a better order.

Taking our thoughts apart can shatter our pride, damage our ego, or smash our self-belief. However, taking our thoughts apart and making changes 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.

Some believe their problem is different, more complex, unlike problems others have. It may seem so, but in truth it is invariably 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 or at the very least feel happy about our courage.

Rather than tackle a problem head on, many of us find workarounds. We can become quite adept at finding ways to avoid the problem. We find ways to avoid confronting our fears. It is understandable given the hideous feeling we get in the pit of our stomachs. Real pain, a true clenching acidic sensation. It is not just a mental foible. These experiences lead us to make excuses. These mighty unpleasant experiences make us shy away and steer clear of something we would rather not face.

Look up at the ceiling. It limits how high you can go in the room you are in. Anxiety has a ceiling too. Your level of anxiety can't rise above that ceiling. When anxiety builds, we want to get it back down as quickly as we can. Wanting it to go down immediately is part of the problem. Knowing that it will peak is helpful. Your anxiety level will not rise and rise to a point of passing out and death. It will not be something that you enjoy, but the result will help you enjoy your life more. The anxiety is stopping you doing something, stopping you taking part in something. Or you have a fear of encountering something on your travels. That is not good.

There is a simple way to rid yourself of any anxiety problem. It does not entail shock therapy, far from it. Gradual easing in works better. Those wanting to deal with social anxiety would not gain from being put on the spot, in front of a large crowd of people. Those wanting to deal with the fear of heights will not benefit from being taken up high into the sky in a crane. Go up five feet, stay there for a few seconds and then come back down. Go up again and come back down. Go up six feet, stay there a while and come back down. And so on. Small steps, a gradual increase.

Each time you face the problem your anxiety will build. You must allow the anxiety to build and wait for it to subside. If anxiety were to be measured on a scale of one to ten, most need to allow the anxiety to pass five before they retreat. It needs to peak somewhere between five and ten for the process to take hold. After it peaks, it will always return to somewhere closer to zero. 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 high level each time. The level will go up, but not by the same amount. The first step is likely to induce the greatest, quickest, rise in anxiety. Hence why that step is usually the hardest.

No matter what the phobia is, dogs, spiders, public speaking, heights, small spaces, crowds you can do something about it. 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. Knowing the root cause of your problem is useful with certain mental conditions but less so with phobias.

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 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.

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 but 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 in the water. 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 technique with my children 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.

Control of yourself

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 into your

house, you will deal with 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.

Maybe the more you wash your hands, the more the skin will be susceptible to infections. The germs will win. Maybe the more you check the door is locked, the more chance someone will see you and think there is something worth stealing in your home. If you tap the wall more than two times, you awaken the karma gods. They will become irritated and will hurt the one you are hoping to protect. Moderation. If you overdo what you are doing it will make it worse for sure, guaranteed.

Bad things might happen. Maybe, maybe not. Never mind. You will deal with the consequences one way or another.

Don't carry out your ritual, let others die. You will go to their funeral. You will remember them in your thoughts. Deep down you know it will not be your fault; the rituals would not have helped. So, let them die.

The lack of control over yourself made you superstitious. Being superstitious is bad luck. Your superstitions made the chance of them dying slightly more likely, not less likely to perish. If you reduce the rituals, bad things are less likely to happen.

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 cells with links between them. One thing linking to another. A strong pronounced memory will have lots of links to it. Lots of strong links. We make new memories by making new links. Therefore, if we change the links we do not want, a memory will fade. The memory cell will remain in place for a while but the links to it can be weakened. To make a memory we don't want fade away from our conscious, we need only re-route some memory cells. To quell a bad memory we need to create a 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, the most anguish. That needs a bypass.

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 semi-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.

When the troublesome thought begins, you must divert before the nasty part and play out the new sequence at that point. You need 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 an 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. Run through a quick conversation. Think about the things he/she is wearing. Focus on what you like about what they are wearing perhaps.

Memories may fade on their own over time, but this process accelerates it considerably. If you have a bad memory of an injured person, displace it with a picture of a healed-up individual. Dwell your mind on the healed-up person. 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 thought path. Run it through for as long as you can.

A re-route in the mind relating to a horrible action that you have seen could involve comeuppance. Those that have bad memories

relating to what someone has done will think of some punishment, comeuppance for the evil doer. In your head you will imagine what the bad man, or bad woman will suffer as punishment for what they have done. Eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth punishment. Whatever story that seems appropriate. Each time you think about this bad person and what they have done, think of the story you have created and how it makes the world a better place now that they have been dealt with. Dwell on the revenge, comeuppance, for ten to fifteen seconds each time. In my mind, the dastard who put a boy to sleep and lay a hot spoon on his eyes to deform him, deformed so that the boy will earn more money from begging, was shot. Bullets shattered the bones of the dastard. The dastard dies in my vivid imagination in a satisfactory way. I will have eternal empathy for the boy but little trouble with the disturbing memory of the evil inflicted upon him. Karma is cathartic. Even imaginary karma.

Strong links create habit pathways. Good habits; experience. Not so good ones; your potential downfall. In the same way that you can get rid of bad memories, you can get rid of undesirable habits. Change the links and you cease your unwanted habit. Rather than just using thought processes alone, one will usually need to physically do things to temper a habit.

Habit paths lead somewhere. They lead to reward. On the way to reward we get excitement and expectation of reward. Thus, to change a habit we need to change the end point. We need to do all but receive the reward to curtail the compulsion. If we go through the first part of the habit and not the second part, the rewarding part, the habit dies. 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 physical enactment will curtail it. 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. An addict will be encouraged to go through these steps and stop at the point of injection. They will be made to handle the drug, prepare it for injection but walk away once ready to inject. 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 no longer lead to anticipation. Habits have reminders. Habits have context, maybe a time of day, a place. A quit smoking advert acts as a perfect reminder to have a cigarette.

People have tried making addicts get bored by their habit. This tactic 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.

Habits, lifestyle, diet, drinking, pleasure and pain. Moderation in all things. Do you feel that you are doing too much of something and not enough of something else. Have you found the desire to change but are tempted to change too much, too quickly, too drastically. Which is sensible: Ditching the car, twice a week, and walking to work. Entering a marathon that is set to take place in a few weeks' time. Be happy with small changes. They add up.

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.

The root

Something started it. Therefore, something will end it.

Something instilled the phobia; a process can amend it. Something disturbing, disgusting, repugnant has rammed itself inside your mind. A process can alleviate the horror. Something has begun to bother you. Knowing something else will reduce that bother. Something has created a jealousy. Something else will dispel the jealousy. A habit has formed. Something will temper that habit.

Does the root cause matter? Sometimes, sometimes not. Herein lies the difficulty with helping those with issues of the mind. Each of our journeys to this point has been driven by curiosity but the paths we have taken differ wildly. There is no one piece of advice that will work for all. Each process needs to be tailored to the person and problem in hand. Each individual needs an individual solution. However, there is a solution, and the solution will be a combination of the many solutions available.

Some things you can change, some things you can temper, some things are fixed. You can't change what you prefer. You can't change what you are sexually attracted to. You can't transform a psychopath into an empath. You can't fix a diseased mind by thought processes. If your memory, motor skills and general abilities have been damaged by disease, help with your mentality can only soften the blow.

Mentality processes aid the following: psychological trauma, habits, phobias, obsessions, compulsions, overwhelming thoughts, excessive anxieties, fears, procrastination, sub-optimal behaviours and anything that results from a misconfiguration of the links in your mind. All we do, is change links. Sometimes, a few key links, often vast banks of linked links.

From one incident, trouble brews. One issue adds to another. The links in the mind become a wretched tangle. The mess is phenomenal. The mess requires a lot of untangling. That takes a considerable amount of time. In the meantime, we find ways to cope. We devise ways to lessen our struggles. Finding ways to help us cope with our day-to-day challenges seems like progress. However, finding ways to cope cements a belief that we will always be like we are. We resign. We accept being stuck with our issues. This is a pity for untangling is possible if we truly want to change ourselves. When the want is there, we need to move to the next stage. Belief. Belief that we can untangle our minds. Belief is an imperative. Cope or fix the issue properly. Which do you want.

The root of all evil may lie with just two things, the devil and socialism. However, the root of our problems will not be found in just two possibilities. Sexual assault, physical assault, torture, unfairness, health disablements, arguments, ostracism, superstitions, misguided beliefs. The list is endless. To deal with the root one may reconfigure our beliefs. Or turn the issue on its head. Or reframe how we see it. Or accept our mediocrity. Or campaign to help others. Or embark on a cause. Or do regular charity work. Or get any job. Any job that will shift our focus despite it being far removed from the sort of work we wish to do longer term.

We made need help reframing the way we see things. Bespoke help is required. We may not be able to work it out for ourselves. Ideas seem obvious and simple in hindsight, but we can be plagued by a problem for years before seeing things in a new light. I have given many examples. How to deal with jealousy regarding a former partner. Dealing with the embarrassment of premature ejaculation. Lot of examples that turn things around and help us live better.

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. If you spend ten times as much as you normally do on a meal, is it ten times better? Is the same meal with different people better. People you treasure, rather than people that crush your will to live. I would savour cardboard, if eating with a girl I loved.

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 us. Appreciating the qualities of the here and now. Some are only satisfied with perfection and rarely enjoy what something is as it is. You can make every interaction with people the best it can be. A bit of humour, niceness, kindness, thoughtfulness, care, concern. Your attitude to the interaction. What could I do right now that would improve people's mood a little.

A mundane afternoon wandering around the shops can be turned into an entertaining experience. It might be a cold day with light drizzle. The weather may not be 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.

The next time you are at a party or gathering, approach the duller looking person and see if you can find out something interesting about them. If not the duller 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 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 whenever it bubbles up, on your own somewhere. Some have had to do this once a week for several months before the anger lessened. 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. We can conserve our energy for the fights that aid our cause, ignoring the temptation to hold everyone to account for their misdeeds.

Onerous

What puts you off starting something? What puts you off carrying on with something? What puts you off going somewhere. Did you feel better for going last time. Many don't think about whether they are going to go, there is 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 than a job not started. If you are procrastinating, ask yourself, will I feel better if I get a bit 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 you have failed a few times 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 way 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.

She had long black hair and found ironing a chore. She realised why she disliked ironing 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 were never the right tools 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.

Lions, tigers, elephants, buffalo, baboons scattered in the savanna. People set off in minivans to see them grazing, wallowing, lazing in the sun. They returned hot and visibly worse for wear. Bumpy dirt roads, sitting in cramped seats. So, we

decided to hire a hunky chunky savanna-mobile. Too dangerous they said but we eliminated the danger of being crushed if in a traffic accident. We could stop where and when we wanted. We had a better view - standing half through the hole in the car roof. Do it right. 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. Surveys say the average is three - once or twice per week. If you are aware of the average, the true 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 their 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 form of the ignorance paradox is often found in group dynamics. I keep myself in ignorance of their matters. I revel in good times with people that I like.

Bully, bully, bully. Bullies are never content. They learn their craft at an early age and bully until they die. It is nice to see them die. Hopefully, god will pull their teeth out one by one. Some abruptly, some with a slow twist and a sideways yank. Then replace them all, and pull them out again, ad infinitum. In the meantime, you find yourself outnumbered. Bullies enlist others to join in. Unity before reason. To counter a bully and their gang, stay cheerful. Work on people one at a time until it all unravels. It is usually the pain from being shunned by what were friends that hurts the most. They are more to blame for tragedies that follow than the

bully. I say it is nice to see bullies die, in some ways, it is as nice to see them live an extended existence, a lonely isolated one, frustrated and dejected.

Boldness

Tricksters do not hesitate. They are not coy. They do not display wariness. Those displaying hesitancy, wariness or coyness are more likely to be spotted, stopped and challenged. Those wanting to pass through security barriers unchallenged, walk with brazen assertive boldness. They adopt the same posture as those that have been granted permission to enter. There will be times in life where boldness 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, make yourself appear that you know what you are doing and where you are going, rather than looking lost and vulnerable. Walk with purpose. When in danger, one can resort to acting crazy and demented. It will confuse the situation giving you vital time to slip away. Wave your hands in the air and make strange noises.

When tension rises, fights appear imminent, we worry too much about the tiny number that will view us as a cowardly chicken if we withdraw. We might do better worrying about a getting a permanent scar on our face which will be there for all to see. You can't fight the whole world. Sooner or later, someone will defeat you; fatally. Do you want an epitaph of bravado or play some more days of your life unharmed. In many wars, only the cowards came home. It was the cowards that let people know the fate of the rest. If you have too many cowards in your army you will lose. That is true, but over-eager people have a lack of respect for what can go wrong. Result; people in their prime get wiped out.

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. It was ideal for a restoration project. 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 making themselves 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. 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 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 interrupting, 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 people address their issues.

Completeness

Wanting to read every book written by a certain author, collecting pottery made at a particular factory, walking to the highest point in every nation, wanting to photograph every known animal within a certain category. Completing something runs in parallel with curiosity. Filling gaps. Gaps being something not yet done. When we complete what we set out to complete, we get a little reward inside our head. We are driven by reward so that in no surprise. The reward does not last very long though. Completion means, no more to do. The drive to complete is no longer there. We must find something else to complete.

I recall a friend going to the shop every day to buy stickers, hoping to fill an album. The hunt for the last few became quite expensive - for the parents that is. When he finally completed the album, he tossed it aside. The album was devised by someone that knew many would want to complete it. They wittingly or unwittingly worked out that people will go to great lengths to complete

something. The company made it deliberately harder to complete by ensuring some stickers were rare.

When we find something out, a gap is filled, and we no longer pay much attention to what we wanted to discover. Unless a discovery leads to more questions. Likewise, once something is complete, we stop caring about it, unless we expand what we are trying to complete.

People claim that they have visited every nation. Who decides whether a visit is a qualifying visit. Does one have to stay in the nation for a certain period of time for it to count. If so, who decides how long. What counts as a nation. Who is the judge of that. Are you going to be the judge of what counts or appeal to others. Do you want it to feel official. Rule-makers and their rules. Power and control. Surrendering to officialdom unnecessarily is weak. Anyone that says they walked all the way around the world is lying. They did not walk across the sea. Some fly home for a funeral, then resume where they left off, on their so-called walk around the world. Many will undoubtedly enjoy the pursuit, the exercise, and the test of endurance. These challenges get us out and about and provide a focus so maybe we ought to avoid sneering too much.

Tactics

You the master, lost to a complete novice. Did you lose because you took short cuts, hoping for a quick win. You know what tactics work well and which do not. A novice will beat a master if the master doesn't stick to the tactics that made them a master. Your stature as a master does not win the game, the tactics a master usually deploys does. Not using your experiences makes a mockery of learning a skill in the first place. Be reliably, boringly, good at what you do. Make considered responses. Act in keeping with your stature. Pause before jumping in. Stick to solid tactics if you want to win.

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 may 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.

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. Few escape making a mistake that they will always regret. However, those weighed down by regrets may consider if any of those regrets can be seen as a mistake which one can learn from. 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.

The 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.

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.

If you think long and hard about what you want, it will magically appear. You will get what you want by the power of thought alone. If only. If you set a goal, print a picture of that goal and put it on the wall, it reminds you of what you want to achieve. That can help motivate you. Motivation will help you get what you want. Where once you saw a barrier, something stopping you, you now see a challenge to overcome because the picture reminds of you of the success that you want to obtain. You therefore summon the spirit and determination inside of you to get what you dream of.

Psychology presumptions

A few psychologists think they are clever by claiming some people are dumb stupid human beings with irrational traits. In the era before self-driving cars, taxi drivers exhibited some odd behaviour. 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 earned 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. Yes, they could do a full day in the rain and have a sunny day off, but 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 houses, are notoriously good at presenting a false image. Some 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. It might be your idea of what is best, but be less autistic and think about who you are tricking, what is better from their point of view.

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 fifty percent chance of being right. Three times and you can bet money on it. A lady arrived on holiday with a bruised black eye. We were told that she fell over a pushchair. We take their word for it. A few days later her partner stood up and apologised for their regular lateness. He made a point of saying that it was his fault and not his wife's fault. At this point we are fifty percent sure that a punch was thrown. A third piece of evidence made us closer to one hundred percent sure. On the last day, she stumbled over to us and said "Jason, is not so bad really".

Now I am beyond certain. Make the initial observation, gather more evidence, but keep your mouth shut until you have at least three items that concur with your suspicion. Note: if Jason rather than his wife had turned up with a black eye, we would assume he deserved it. Further evidence would not have been sought. Perpetrators of violence in the home are not predominantly male. Too many assume the male-female ratio of victims is ninety-ten when it is closer to fifty-fifty.

What evidence have you got? Evidence is your saviour. Have you checked to make sure what someone is saying is true? Have you found evidence that goes against your beliefs, but decide to ignore it and focus only on the evidence that backs up your claim? Due diligence. Check with the person involved first to verify the claims. Due diligence saves a fortune in time and embarrassment. Our assumption might be right, but evidence has greater value.

Knives can be used for cooking or stabbing people. In the right context, knives are helpful, good but they are often used to harm. 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 psychology to harm. You can make someone feel crazy for not trying, not giving something a go. You can harm or heal with the same psychology tool. Look at the intentions. 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 nice meal in effect. Psychological ploys can help people, be used for good. They can also be used for bad effect. It depends on the intentions of those deploying them.

A cheater, a swindler, a chancer, will copy a good person in all but intent. They try to emulate genuine decent people. Good people can look like bad people. Bad people can look like good people. A quick examination of the traits someone is exhibiting can lead us to the wrong conclusion. We need to uncover someone's intent. That can take a while.

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 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. A little knowledge is a dangerous thing. Over confidence can be dangerous. Being frequently right before, does not necessarily make you right about the person you are analysing now. Check your facts. Listen. Ask more. Listen. Gather more evidence. Admit your mistakes. Be humble.

Me the judge and jury

Emblazoned upon his back in the small town on the small island named Curaçao 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 decide 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 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. 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. We judge without much thought and 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.

When we hear about something for the first time, a new seed is born in our minds. If that something happens to be a complaint, the person making the complaint lies at the heart of the seed. They get first mover advantage. We listen to the complaint and build on the seed. Irrespective of whether the complaint is facile, vexatious or deadly serious, the defendant is disadvantaged by being second in line to tell their side of the story. People are lazy, and that laziness means we make our minds up before we bother to listen to the defendant. The defendant won’t create a new seed, instead, their rebuke, their counter arguments are added to the seed created by the complainant.

New facts can emerge which show that our judgement was not fair and reasonable. The central premise upon which we have built an argument maybe faulty. When we replace the central node, all the links to it need amending too. That means rearranging hundreds of links in our head. That takes effort.

Hence, why many choose to ignore new facts. It is easier to leave it all in place and formulate an excuse to keep the links in our mind the way they are.

Countering false accusations is a tough task. Serious accusations need to be countered in a serious fashion. The accuser will hope you disappear, vanish and not be heard of again. To their surprise you do anything but vanish and disappear quietly. You are not afraid. If you have done little wrong, you need not be afraid. Accusers do not permit due process because that allows the truth to emerge. The accuser assumes that a complaint will silence you. The accuser may be more at fault than you. Check the law. Who broke the law? Do your homework first. Most of us will be unfamiliar with legalise, legal procedures and what constitutes an act that breaks the law. However, with a little reading you can counter a false claim. You may not have to go anywhere near a courtroom, as establishing who is right and who is in the wrong will be enough to remedy the situation.

When someone believes a lie, you can simply ask, "Do you really believe that?" Too much time is devoured trying to convince people that you are innocent of feckless accusations. It doesn't help that cultural norms train us to believe that those of a certain gender are always the ones at fault.

How many of us need to prove ourselves before being taken seriously. Prove ourselves not a danger. Prove ourselves worthy as the rest. Some of us spend an eternity proving ourselves. Others get instant respect. Life is unfair. People make fast judgements, there is no time to make lengthy appraisals of everyone we meet. 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. However, not all will judge us by our presentation alone for they have the generosity and willingness to assume we are an equal until proven otherwise.

Some people stand out. Not because of the way they look, but by the way they look at you. She looked me in the eyes. In fairness, she looked everyone in the eyes, never making some feel unworthy of her gaze. She didn't show me a great deal of reverence, nor treat me with particularly high regard. What she did was make me feel liked. I was treated fairly by her. Two smiles in one day spoke volumes. One signalled wanting to be there, the other keenly wanting to do it. Generosity. Non-judgmentalism. Devine joy. Valid. Worthy. Not excessive exuberant respect, but simple respect.

Not worth it

Jane feared her father going after the rapist, so she decided that she would not report the attacker. Not worth it. Sarah felt the same, as did Racheal. Tina on the other hand stepped up and pressed charges. The rapist was found guilty. The story made the local news. Jane, Sarah and Racheal wrote a follow-up story stating their trouble they had with this rapist. They mentioned how glad they were to see him behind bars. Tina became furious. Had any one of those women reported the rapist she would not have been subjected to her ordeal. In many cases, rapists commit six crimes before being put on trial. Maybe the fathers would fume rather than be violent. Maybe this, maybe that. If a society wants to lower the rate of sexual assaults, more need to act. Men can suffer in similar ways, at similar rates and will find it very hard to come forward. Man on man rape receives a different level of sympathy. Shame and disgust hinder getting help. However, the not worth it mentality allows dreadful things to persist.

Every false accusation damages the cause. They dilute the potential to obtain convictions. It adds another tale that can be used by the defence to cast doubt on those making valid accusations. Which is the most chronic, false accusations or non-reporting? There is no definitive answer. When someone makes a false accusation, they find themselves trapped. They find it incredibly difficult to reveal the truth. The longer we stick to the story, the harder it becomes to set the record straight. Do the right thing. A huge weight will be lifted from you. The sooner you admit your error, the more easily you will be forgiven. It is never too late to admit your mistake though. Do the right thing.

Knowledge is a powerful thing. Know this. Those you spurned often make false accusations. Let people down gently. Very gently. Very carefully. An unwanted kiss. An approach by someone far too young. Unrequited love. A thousand scenarios with a common theme. You most likely did the right thing. You rejected out of decency, but the spurned retaliate. It seems sensible and proper to ignore the one you rejected. Perhaps give them a little attention instead. Not too much, just a little to allow the feelings to settle.

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 upon change 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. That assumes the idea is not too zany nor too unsafe.

Atonement

What you have done is bad. Maybe, very bad. You can't undo what is done. You may atone for your sins. An apology is a start, not always an end. Can something be done to lower the chance of such a thing happening again? Good deeds in the future may give you a sense that you counterbalanced the bad things you did. In truth, nothing can right certain wrongs. Nothing helps. Nothing helps enough to compensate for the damage caused. The universe is uncaring. Things move. Things change, nothing more.

Karma is not a mythical force, nor some energy that punishes the bad. Karma is when unkind habits rub up against someone that lashes out rather than lets it go. You punch five people, and they all walk away bruised and crushed. The sixth person is stunned and shaken but retaliates with vigour smashing you hard on the hard floor. The five knew this would happen, they spoke of it as proof of karma to come. Karma catches up with the confident. Those that do bad things, do bad things more than once. The bad behaviour becomes a bad aura surrounding the bad person attracting the forces of karma.

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. 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 is hopeless for your shopping and prone to getting stuck in the mud. 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 twenty 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. Things have negatives and positives. No tool no gadget no item is perfect for all circumstances irrespective of how much money they cost. Every change we make to something leads to a compromise; you improve something at the expense of something else.

Could a perfect human being be designed and created? What is the perfect height. There are advantages to being tall but shorter people can crawl more easily through tight spaces. We humans are built for certain things. Strengths in one area are 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.

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. No arguments, no discord, no chance to be yourself. The world will always be full of strife, there will always

be risks, there will always be injustices and unfairness. Perfection is accepting compromises.

Dissent

Dissent takes many of us by surprise. It often comes from someone who doesn't have many friends. Someone who is prone to falling out with lots of people. They hold a grudge. Forgiveness is out of the question. They feel slighted perhaps or believe you are getting undeserved attention and too much respect - they ought to be in your position, they are as talented as you.

Most of us let things go. We let people be. We understand that no one is perfect. We admire those that achieve a lot. We do jostle for position but won't tear someone down simply because we don't like their views. We debate with them instead and build our own following. A dissenter is a different beast. They take issue with something you said perhaps, or something you have done. Once dissent starts it often builds relentlessly. Dissenters enlist others to help attack you. They will turn anything positive about you into a negative.

If you are known for charity work, they will reframe your good work as something you are doing simply to make yourself look good. To the dissenter your success in life was all luck. Your popularity is misplaced, bought rather than earned. Everything you do shall be seen in a negative light. All positives are viewed with cynicism. It only takes one small thing to spark dissent. One thing about you that someone doesn't like. One thing that you said. One thing taken the wrong way. One misinterpretation. Whether trivial or not, that thing will mar all else that you do. From then on, the dissenter questions why you should count more than them. Why listen to you when their views should always take centre stage. When a dissenter is in your presence, they don't like to see people listening to you. The moment you appear to be getting an audience they will 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.

Most of us won't pay a great deal of attention to what you do, nor care about what you may have said or not said. Most don't care that much as they have more than enough of their own things to contend with. Most understand that you may not be a saint but see you as a decent sort. However, whereas the majority get on with their lives and continue making pleasantries with you, the dissenter will try and turn people against you. They will sway others in earnest. A true dissenter will make it their life's work to defame you and make you appear as bad as possible.

The dissenter might decide that giving you a wide berth is not befitting them. Instead, they prefer to stir up maximum trouble, by any means at their disposal. Nothing illegal or dastardly, but endless vocal action. They need to do this without compromising their own position. They will spread half-truths. Never giving the full story as that will do the opposite of what they want to achieve. Those who listen to the full story will see you in a good light.

Any story can be spun to make you seem disingenuous. People can make you appear untrustworthy or make others want to disown you. 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 be an element of doubt in the air. When a slanderous story is published a number of people will read it. However, not all of them will read any correction or apology printed later. Slander tarnishes our image no matter what. It is nice to be proven innocent, but we have our work cut out trying to dispel the lies. Dissenters know this.

You may have to be secretive, not because of a desire to be sly, but secretive to protect somebody or avoid jeopardising a future event. A dissenter sees this secretiveness as bad form rather than appreciate that you needed to be discreet. Most will be fully understanding when they find out everything that is going on, but you 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.

Dissenters try to dissuade people from talking to you using rational, irrational, emotive arguments - anything they can think off to get people to go along with them. Some won't accept their line of reasoning, but that doesn't matter so long as the numbers grow. Some people can be swayed quite easily but others will take much more persuasion. A dissenter will keep it going, enlisting the adage of no smoke without fire. They must prevent you from dousing their nonsense with a cold bucket of truth.

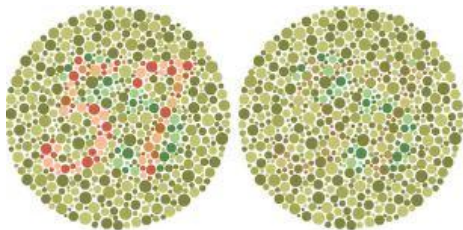
A new member of your group can change the dynamic. Some members don't like the competition. Some prefer the way it was before. This can be one of many things that seed dissent. It will hinge on something being dislikeable. It matters not one jot if the person whom you are gunning for is a laudable individual. All attributes are switched to negative. It goes further than 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. Things that you have done are magnified beyond belief. Most would not pay any serious attention to it were it not for the effort the dissenter has gone to spread falsehoods. Milking something small and making it seem important is a dissenter's primary tactic. Having hate in their

heart will not bother them in the slightest. Dissenters feed off the reaction to their attack. Simply ignoring it is not always possible. A story is half told, facts distorted, blatant untruths banded about. This can become an irritation. So, we need a solution. Showing annoyance makes it worse.

There are good moves, profitable moves, aggressive moves, passive moves, bluffs. Lots of moves. To each of these moves there are counter moves. In the game of life there will be something you can do too, to counter what people are doing. What should one do to counter a dissenter. One option is to embrace them, have them be your personal troll. Trolls boost your rankings and ratings. All great people will have trolling dissenters, gathering more as their ubiquity rises. Does poking fun in return make the situation worse? Does thanking them for their input help? Can we maintain our composure. Do we simply put the record straight when it really matters, rather than at every twist and turn. This can be hard, particularly when you do not know who the perpetrator is. If it escalates and turns threatening it is harder still. Take control, respond to the avalanche of vitriol. Reply once a day – only once per day. Ignoring the fool may not work. If we feed them nothing, they get hungry, and the anger levels rise. As days turn into weeks the single daily response melts the snow.

I gained a few trolls along the way for one simple reason. I told people the truth. They become trolls because they didn't listen to all that I had to say. They heard the truth but didn't give me the chance to speak about a solution to their psychological issue. The truth came with a solution which would have been most useful to them. However, they did not like me for it. Hence why we are inclined to tell white lies or keep our mouths shut.

We really do see things differently



People who are colour blind may not see the numbers/letters in these circles of green dots. 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 else. 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 to do 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. Some will take your word for it whilst others will 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.

Some like the idea of maximum freedom and personal responsibility. Others like the idea that we contribute lots to a central pool to share out. Every political argument stems from a personal preference and personal moral reasoning. People will always disagree about what they deem fair because their biological genome is different. That genome contributes enormously to our individual way of thinking.

I am the one

We can see the fifty-seven amongst the green dots. We can see the number in the other circle too. We can see things that other people can't in all walks of life. We can see how things could be improved. We have theories about what we think really happened in notable events. We push these theories hoping that people will listen, but most of all to prove the doubters wrong. We will feel most elated if our theories turn out to be correct and our beliefs vindicated. We will feel most superior and obtain the deserved moniker, a prophet of prescience. We knew we were right to stick firmly to our beliefs. We held firm despite all the scepticism. We lamented others for not sharing our opinion. We were the brave ones that kept our head above the parapet. We did not follow the herd. It would be a dream come true if one could demonstrate to the whole world, or at least to one's clan, that you were right and everyone else was wrong. And best of all you managed this before you died. However, for each success story in this realm, there are countless others that go to their grave convinced that they were right but didn't have their beliefs widely validated. The dissenter wants to be that one brighter individual that proves that they were justified in uncloaking the devil, preventing the target from getting away with something.

Self-belief can pay dividends, but many are unable to reappraise their beliefs. Some never stop to consider whether they are wrong. Others think that since something is supported by so many people, it must be right. Can vast numbers be wrong? Yes, they can when they are all forced, coerced and cajoled into a belief system.

You may see something that worries you - are you going to find out more before you alert others. Things may appear out of place, but it may turn out to be all fine.

How many musicians make it to the top of their profession? Not many. Many think they will achieve global notoriety when they see others attain worldwide acclaim with mediocre songs. Random fortuitous luck plays a part in 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. The more well-known artists there are the less well known each one becomes.

Rate, review and recommend

Some well-meaning friends booked us into a hotel. It was in a great location. The furnishings were splendid - wild and new. I had nothing to complain about. That was until I opened the curtains. I was faced with a wall. No window. For some that would be of little concern, but it gave me cause to find somewhere else the next day. Hotel rooms, restaurants, things we buy, all have key ingredients. Bits that are vital to garner our overall approval. If one of those key ingredients is deficient then we find fault with other things too. Other issues that would normally be a minor niggle 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 personally feel is most important.

People will push for a better deal, not a fair deal, a better deal, irrespective of who they deprive in the process, irrespective of the long-term effects. We might fight hard for a discount, so hard that the merchant goes out of business. Then we complain that we no longer have the cosy corner café to commiserate in anymore. Our dissent, our stinginess, our petty complaints stack up. Our appraisals of things are based on our in-built preferences, so do we need to be so harsh if we accept that it is our tastes that dictate how we rate things. Dissent destroys. It destroys things for others - others with different tastes to you.



The art of art; 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 is usually a minor twist on another established concept, maybe a change in scale or a new combination.

I take assiduous care with taglines that accompany my works.

“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, one does well to 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

One vote every four or five years. That is about all we get in regards a say so in how our country is run. A lot of those votes count for nought if the political group is not very well supported. Those in a minority camp find themselves out voted in every election. Some elections are rigged and are nothing more than a sham. Some of us will 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. They therefore make do and put up with the way things are. It is rare for us all to witness changes made in our favour. People that do get involved in politics find themselves in endless meetings trying to get agreement. The more attending the meeting the more you spot falling asleep. Endless intricacies of what to do are debated. Politics is a difficult business as the electorate have vastly different wishes. Politicians need to address the wide variety of demands and cater to so many disparate people.

Perhaps we could find a small island and build a better way of life. 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. They sit by the campfire and start discussing the details, planning what sort of community they are going to build.

Ben is always looking ahead, driven 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 is a visionary, an ambitious one. That is fine, there is hope that lots of projects can be embarked upon to make life on the island great. Clean water, grow food aplenty, shelter, toilet facilities, cooking and cleaning areas plus ever more tools to make life easier. Ben wants to ensure everything is as good as it can be with the limited resources available. They look ahead to the prospect of having children and want them 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 as they have, 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 sees a problem with this. One person can be regularly outvoted. They are prone

to major rancour and upset regarding key issues. Some may be 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 had noble aims - trying to keep everyone happy. Those implementing this kind of practice discovered that the only thing that got done was a lot of talking. Having group decisions rather than one person making all the decisions 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. It will be like sailing, jiving in a northerly direction. Each tack makes headway despite the wild swings east and west. One person moves it northeast, the next northwest.

The one thing they do not want to see is some kind of hypocrisy. Claudia has seen people encourage others to forfeit things whilst living an elevated life themselves. Claudia has the benefit of a religious upbringing and therefore can bring a lot of its useful 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. They can manage without god 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. The chairman ensures all get to speak. They allow one person at a time to make their case with brevity in mind. 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 one on an issue or hold back and use lots of them on something that they have bigger concerns about. So long as a majority is cast, namely, three or more stones have been submitted, then the motion is approved.

People enjoy excluding others. Those that try to exclude the less knowledgeable will present things in a convoluted complex way rather than in plain simple terms. Add in plenty of jargon and

many will have no clue as to what they are agreeing to. All four will look out for clever mind games. Watching to see if anyone gets pushed aside. Forceful characters, popularity contests, people jostling for position and ignoring some people's opinions whilst gushing over others. Lots of ways people are denied the opportunity to steer things in relation to the running of the island. Having people voting in concert simply to avoid any friction is not the answer. That can be because they are not fully conversant with the motions put forward or because they don't want to be seen objecting too much.

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. In these places, people feel that they are a failure if not doing super wonderful things. The fly saw the farcical pretence that people are willing to work hard predominantly for the greater good. Few work hard just for the benefit of others and remain content in their own lives. The fly waits for a hopeful to pass then heads towards the body to lay a bundle of eggs just beneath the upper dermis. The eggs hatch and maggot their way out consuming the bulk of the buried body. 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. Must all play their part and help as best they can? 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 various ways.

Claudia knows that one day there will be someone that will not muck in. No helping, no food is the mantra. However, once their tummy begins to 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 Dave to get out of the hammock and into action. Dave needs endless prodding else will be found lying down for most of the day. 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 underlying message from it though. That is, try pointing out those that appear even lazier than you. In addition, it was easy to grasp the power of the following tactic: push your argument to the max with as much emotive sentimental 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.

Things evolve. Times change. Problems emerge. Things that were less of an issue in the past become ever more troublesome as each year passes. As a result, policy makers adapt the rules. We hope that new policies enacted make it fairer for the majority. However, with any new policy there will be a proportion of losers – often a minuscule number. Complaints come in and it is usually the plight of the few that will be mentioned. People will make compelling arguments against the new policies, 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. We might not want to dismiss their plight, but the extent of the hardship is usually 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 trying 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. People believe 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 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 all of them believe their driving is impeccable. They too will shout out 'idiot' rather than consider why someone is dithering and holding us up a little. Perhaps they are looking for a place, checking the directions? Ben always drives perfectly, or so he thinks. It is always the other person that is 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, make tasks less of a chore. An hour spent today improving something can save three minutes a day thereafter. That time investment 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 greater comforts is attractive. We can get carried away though and spend our days doing nothing but work. 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 persistently worrying about every little detail, worry about what could be done to make things better, you have less time to appreciate time itself, time doing things that enrich your existence. Dave will play a part for sure but won't become encumbered by guilt for not always playing to the tune of the rest of the group.

All four discover in short order that things will never pan out quite as well as they had hoped. Dreams and reality never quite match. Their grand vision of what life on the island was meant to be like falls by the wayside. Things are good but not as glorious as they would like. Nevertheless, they have created a system that provides for everyone and gives them an opportunity to bring children up. All 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 questions whether they would allow 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 arrive having left a place that has become uninhabitable.

The four all agree that if anyone were to join, they must respect the current leadership and abide by 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.

Dave asks a more profound question. 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 sacrifice too much nor go beyond the call of duty to help others. Certainly not to such an extent that they will miss out on key things. 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. They can fit more people in, a lot more. It will mean longer waits at the well, more noise and more disruption, but potentially more things getting done too. There is a trade-off between some attractive benefits against less serenity and loss of control. New ideologies may not be particularly welcome now that so many principles have been established and enjoyed.

Claudia has another worry; what if they are invaded, not by one person but a large group? 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 is 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 they have the means necessary to put things right. It can be tough for people to leave their place of 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. Not all 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 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 more focused on spreading an ideology as far afield as possible. Hence, we are faced with invaders by force or by stealth. Some play the long game, waiting for sufficient traction to spring a new way of life on all of us. An individual will attain power, cement it, dominate, and show little restraint when pushing objectors aside. A fungus punctures the apple's skin, forms a tiny dot but in short order consumes the entire fruit turning it into a fetid mush.

Philosophy underpins everything, including the principles upheld by a nation state. Those principles however are open to interpretation. Some principles are prioritized over others. The ruling bodies decide which principles to focus on. Constitutions mention the need to ensure self-reliance in all things. Defence, agriculture, commerce and so forth. People in charge take it upon themselves to ensure that no stone is left unturned getting defences in place but spend so much money 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. Ben gets aggravated by always 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. It 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 needed. Dave would rather have just one communal knife, one they all can 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. Make an additional knife or use the time to make something else? That something could be something for all to use or something for just their sole use. Either way it makes them richer in effect. An additional knife eliminates the bugbear of waiting for someone else to finish using the communal one. Well-meaning principles can be great on paper but hopeless in reality. Community-ism schemes only work if everyone is exactly the same in every single respect. Individuality has to be banished along with freedoms to choose for ourselves.

Convenience matters. People pay for convenience. We could share the use of cars but the choice of models would be lacking. It also means ignoring the mess some leave them in. We would need to be patient waiting for one to be available. We can't personalise a shared car. All to benefit from a relatively small reduction in costs. The fuel costs would be more, not less, as the shared car needs to be moved empty to each person wanting it. The wear and tear on the brakes and tyres etc. and the depreciation in value are dependent 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 ignore our unwillingness to change for dubious benefits. People want to retain a way of life yet are willing to cut back if there are clear advantages. If you have concerns about your personal consumption and the impact it has on the environment, you can choose to earn less. Only by earning less does one 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 rewards, 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, those that do the jobs that are the least enjoyed are paid more in compensation for doing what others are less willing to do. In a controlled sharing economy, it would be nice to see all the plum favoured jobs handed out fairly with an abundance of volunteers to deal with the grim ones. However, rather than working hard on the work

that needs to be done, people become adept at proving why they should be treated better than the rest. The people that support the party in power get the beachside houses, the rest get allocated a tiny grim plot on a flood plain.

Before coming to this island, Ben used to buy first class tickets but go without other things to pay for them. Exercising freedom to choose. To buy those tickets Ben saved money by buying second hand furniture rather than fancy new tables and chairs. We need not be envious of Ben. Let Ben do what he wants.

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 before the borders are locked down to stop people from leaving. As things get progressively worse, those in command are constantly suppressing uprisings. Once it becomes extremely out of balance, Claudia's nightmare becomes evident. 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 not 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. You can eat, and drink from them. Then make some maracas out of what remains. What you can't do is borrow them. You can only consume what you have. An I-Owe-You, the promise to pay back an amount you borrow. Big states generate lots of these. Eating the fruits that you expect to have tomorrow makes the policy maker appear decent. However, it is nasty practice that puts a strain on 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 savings 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.

The general populace is capable of counting a few coconuts. Understanding big numbers is another thing entirely. Economic facts are hard to comprehend and difficult to put into perspective. The same data can be interpreted in all manner of ways leading to no end of strife. Some will argue that funding a scheme will only cost two percent of a nation's productivity. That doesn't sound too bad. However, it could be four percent of the nation's tax income. Both facts are true, one demonstrates the real effect on the government's budget. Truths can be misleading.

No matter how badly politicians mess up, they are rarely held to account. They walk away unburdened by the problems they created. The mess is left for others to deal with. 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.

Racheal has charisma which is not coupled with competence. Claudia is dour and has a dryness that is not coupled with aspirational zeal. Leadership strengths are coupled with downsides. We may do well to call on someone with a chequered past to halt a slow slide into dystopia. Such people are less afraid to take on the blinkered stoics that keenly watch us flounder further towards dystopic disaster. We may wisely harness the devilment within a bad person to assassinate a very bad actor. The bad used to kill the utter bad. A dry, or dour, or charisma filled soul would be the one we prefer to act on our behalf, but they merely delay the inevitable.

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 others involved. Nevertheless, it can be rather rewarding doing 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. Hopefully, finding the fit that suits your mind-set. Both tacks can be sparkling. Sometimes we are coerced into group activities rather than invited. There can also be pressure to make people feel as though they must repay a debt to society.

I did the work so I should get the reward. That is how a lot of us feel. When we keep all the proceeds everything is crystal clear.

You decide upon how profits are spent, whereas when we work for the good of the whole, the benefits are cloudy. Would you work more hours to pay for something that enhances your child's life, better education, better equipment, better whatever? Now think if you would honestly do a lot of work, extra work, in order to help children you don't know that live a long way away. Some will but very few put their heart and soul into it for any great length of time. Most are willing to give some of the proceeds of their labour to the community. Some, but not too much. Finding the sweet spot between what we keep for ourselves and what we hand over to others is a task for the thick skinned - people that can brush off the flak.

Free to leave

Following the debate about allowing people in, the four began to debate the next topic. The 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 suggests they formulate a set of basic principles. These fundamental aims lay out the most important values of this small society. There will be just seven of them so that they are easily kept at the forefront of everyone's mind. Ben wants to avoid expanding on these tenets, for it can lead to a super complex set of principles that get ever harder to understand and enforce.

Ben declares that respect ought to be given to people's desire to leave. There shall be freedom to leave the island at any time unhindered. Ben next declaration as leader; They shall endeavour to respect peoples' desires rather than give people rights as such. Claudia likes the idea of elementary laws but needs to be convinced that Ben's declaration is adequate. Rachael also thinks it all sounds a little whimsical and not as definitive as strict cast iron protective laws. Yet we see around the globe that no law stops dreadful actions. As far as people's wish to leave goes, that is quite simple. They will do their utmost to enable them to leave if they so choose. More importantly they appreciate people's desire to live. Most people on the island can see this and can make sure nobody does anything to infringe upon that. 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 legal consequences of our actions play a part in our refrain, but it is largely our empathy towards others that has a more powerful effect in holding us back from hurting others. Having aims set out which are well promoted and encouraged is novel but effective. The group will ensure that any transgressions are reported and dealt with in a timely fashion.

Those in charge must adhere to the aims too. They 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 a property 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 an offer, 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 big 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. The group wants to, 'make sure it doesn't happen again'. Getting someone to say sorry and incarcerating them for a period does not guarantee that they will not reoffend. Racheal 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. Any unpolished turds born on the island charged with misdemeanours on other islands would be accepted back to face trial.

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. Protecting potential victims is the priority. That 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.

If there were a major flood and the deluge puts prisoners in jeopardy, do we release them to ensure they do not drown? Many will suggest they do, despite the warning that innocents will be potentially harmed or killed by highly volatile convicts. We have our own morals. They are personal inventions with much of it handed down to us from the elders. Many see it as morally dubious to allow someone out when 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. However, people can justify their thinking. They know who they have the greatest concern for. One need not dwell too long upon the plight of all the wrongdoers, they have raped, tortured and murdered beautiful innocent people. They acted without mercy and deserve none in return.



Some get wrapped up in a utility argument. They believe that anyone too old, or too feeble should be discarded. Once your usefulness comes to an end you are taken to 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. They get great satisfaction from devising more restrictions. They enjoy tinkering with ever more things, dictating what you can and can't do in your private life.

Some will say that you can pass any law you like, just do not enforce it. 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. It is good to have a small but significant percentage of the population who are prepared to make a stand. 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 when you see troubling events unfolding on other islands? Do you let them get on with it, or do you try to bring order to a seemingly chaotic situation? You would certainly want a discussion with people if they were storing flammable material close by or polluting the water upstream. If you become aware of people torturing one another 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 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.

The thought processes these people had when setting up this island may be agreeable or repulsive but give a hint of the quandaries they faced. One doctrine may override another. They would always be stuck with some difficult compromises. No island would be perfect. When choosing which island to settle on, better weather may outshine the frustration with the political framework. Looking down from space it is plain to see that we are mere insects building nests and adjusting to the ecosystem.

When thinking about the rules upheld within nations, many teenagers pipe up and ask why we need rules at all. It is not outside the bounds of possibility to create a free for all nation, everyone for themselves. That state of affairs has arisen in places from time to time. Some have pushed for the dissolution of government and want it replaced entirely by private enterprise. They suggest that 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.

Whilst Claudia is surprised that we don't have more lands with a free for all, Rachael is more surprised that there are so many lands where the bulk of the population accept the status quo. Why do so many tolerate the oppression and control. Ben asks how many people have grown up in their community and assumed that everything is normal and how things are supposed to be. 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 that only a few people change the name given to them at birth not many want to go against the grain. Things evolved bit by bit. One change after another. A gradual shifts of mindset. If the changes were imposed in one afternoon we would notice it. As the changes are so slow and gradual we accept them, live with them, and abide by the new rules. Governments get us accustomed to a small restriction, then add another, a little at a time.

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 dispels artificial rankings. It is evident that some show great delight in type casting people and thus obtaining a higher or lower status than the rest. People preserve their caste, class, and social orders to maintain the differential and be a part of 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 that which gives a clear demonstration that we have equal validity, neither looking up nor down at one another. No person gets treated with more leniency nor more harshness. 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 allocated a small plot of land on the island upon which they may build a shack. The land is all they shall be given. No help with the materials to begin construction, just approval to build something of a reasonable size. The cost to the community is negligible, but the benefit is huge. All will have a stake in the island. 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. Those that wish for free allowances ignore the fact 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 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.

On a small island there will be no hospitals. The government will be too small to check standards and check the 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.

This simplistic tale of setting up and running a small island could run to thousands of pages. Thousands of pages would still not cover the basic things let alone the finer details. Yet thinking about what you would do in a small community helps us decide what to do in bigger societies. When you work out 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. Ignore what is included, ignore what has been missed out. What would you do on a small island? Work that out then apply it your nation's orthodoxy.

The group kept a list of motions that were agreed on by all. Whilst vague they 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- make it safe to explore ideas. Encourage people to mock ideological grandiosity. Place the welfare of the general populace above those that have done harm. All people are equally valid in all things. Remind people that morality is opinion.

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. Give people hope that they might live forever or return to a faultless better world. You must convince them to believe. Point this out to people; there is always hope even in the word hopeless. Show that if they have faith, real undeniable faith they will be rewarded. Rewarded tremendously if they follow your guidance closely. Don't be fooled, you will give people great comfort and relieve them of a mountain of anxiety. They will have purpose and reason. A wave of relief will 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. Make yourself seem pious by pretending to give some of other people's money 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 can feel free to hive off modest living excesses. You will need to as you won't have time to work - work is for followers not leaders. You will be honourably justified to take, take, and take what is required.

Now you face a choice. How bold are you going to be? You could aim low. Maybe, commence proceedings by becoming a local preacher. That will be pretty good. It offers a modicum of power. Most at that rank are self-appointed. You only need people to believe in you. A little study. A little effort and you can answer questions posed to you. 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 creating laws that cross all boundaries. People will come to visit you from far afield, often 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 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 have seen a much brighter more impressive light than that. They are also better than me at convincing people that they were individually picked out to spread a message from out 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 it fairly accurate to what is blatantly wrong is worse than something knowingly given at random. It is akin to the placebo effect; being told you are going to be alright by a doctor in a white coat. We believe in the person. The same information given by someone else can mean very little.

Rational thinking is unhelpful in the realms of hocus-pocus. It would be so nice if loved ones recently departed made the effort to watch over us. We seek positivity casting aside potential downsides to silly para-normal things. If something in my house moves it could be a sign from my late partner. It could be but it is probably not. If it were and my partner wants me to join them, they need do nothing bar 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 reconcile yourself as being a spiritual saint holding 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 that your efforts are a triumph. However, keep quiet you must as keeping quiet is essential, any boasting 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. Messengers can con themselves into believing in the grand role they must play. Some have sacrificed the remainder of their life in the hope that their death will add greater meaning to the life they lived. Their legacy weighs heavily on them. The legacy outweighs a few more years of bounty. Sacrificing oneself is not a great rarity though. Protesters have doused themselves with petrol and set themselves alight. Others have signed their death warrant when making a stand against the government. Many died trying to defeat an enemy. Therefore, you will need a bit of mystery and intrigue to make sure your early death is not ignored. Somehow you need to provide proof of some sort that god sent you on this vital mission.

Your religion may be popular now, but all religions started off as tiny groups. No different to random pop artists that gradually became 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. It doesn't feel so bad eating from the after-funeral buffet if you have endured a bit of reflection at the service prior. Aside from hosting 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. There are always downsides to all stances we take. Believing is not without cost. Do we need something grand? Something big, better, and substantive that goes beyond a humble life of endless distraction. Something that goes beyond the realms of simple biology making

us more than blood and water. 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. Many talented committed people were assigned the task of building them. So much effort. 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 without music allowing the heart of the human voice to be 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 messages can be powerful. A greater one need not have given them 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, containing 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. Whilst you want to avoid coming across as superior you don't want to appear shallow either, the aim is to make people feel included. 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 living a worthless mediocre life.

You will meet quite a few pesky awkward types that will ask difficult questions. This might dampen your enthusiasm and knock the aura of confidence you have in your faith and your religion. Despite not having all the answers people seek, you can like any good salesman, go and talk to a scholarly accomplice who will help you concoct a convincing response. 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 attitudes change. We cannot always foresee issues that will arise in the future. This made things difficult for those producing documents that purport to have eternal resonance. Things 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 for our team to win. When both teams are praying 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 wouldn't have 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 some 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 obvious. All the discussions you have had with assorted people 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. We believe 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 not exactly an enticing way to see things. Even a legacy will not make up for the loss of eternal life here after. However, we zookeepers 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.

I could do a much better job than the god we have at the moment. I would intervene on a daily basis. I would rid the world of the endless evil. I would sort things out. If you were god, would you solve some of the most pressing issues or stand by and watch the torment and terror continue? God fails us, repeatedly. He does not care. Sufferance, sacrifice, penance all chime with delusion and folly rather than with an all knowing, all understanding, all feeling entity. I believe in better the hapless do not.

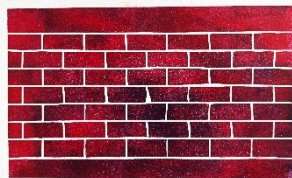
You may say there are signs of his presence, but I am sceptical. We may kill someone for the greater good, sometimes it is accidental. Often a death is a result of something premeditated. Whatever the truth, if god showed himself minutes before a dastardly deed unfolds, he could talk the person out of causing harm. But god does not show himself. Preachers will devise a cunning explanation, but in truth there is no explanation why a decent, feeling, caring, loving god doesn't halt bad actions. And what sort of god is he that insists on making people believe predominantly via intimidation, violence and fear?

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. 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 and pick one out of the five portents that seems appropriate. You 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 micro-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 damaged 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, for me, you can't beat blue skies and warmer weather. I notice my mood lift, 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. Beliefs stem from laziness. Beliefs arise when we don't know the answers.

The essence of science is to set out an experiment, repeat it over and over to see if it is consistent. Then publish the result so that other people can do the same experiment and see if they get the same result. 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 an 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. Science is precision. Statistical evidence is often misquoted as science. Statistics gives you belief, but bad actors mislabel it as scientific proof. The semantics matter as the use of one word in place of another lends itself to coercive behaviour. Important, vital. Large, noticeable. Should, could. Science, statistics.

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 are difficult to prove one way or another. 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 sub-atomic particles which in turn use the field to transfer energy. Given that there are so many electrons moving about precipitously inside your head and everywhere in your surroundings, there would undeniably be lots of interference. Thus, this could explain why spiritualists get so much wrong.

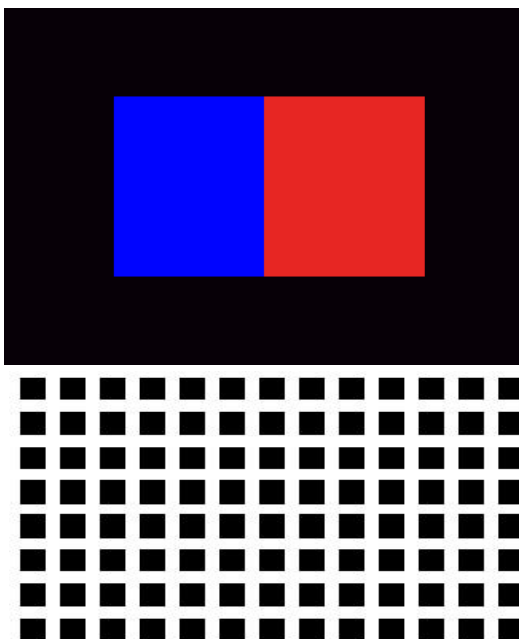
Any mystic worth their salt would have a good grounding in body language. Mystics will jump on any reaction to what their punters say in the affirmative and gloss over everything that show signs of being at odds with someone's expectations. Psychology is a different ball game. A good psychologist makes 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, so with practice they become adept at using their intuition. Sheer brazen confidence helps a mystic avoid being deemed a fraud. When someone smirks upon uncovering your resplendent profession, 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 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 exploring a shipwreck become stuck. A heavy metal door fell on top of him. He was trapped. Thankfully, a dive buddy was on hand to help. The buddy managed to lift the door up enough for the man to be freed. It was either god being kind or an angel that was watching over them. What else could have given them the strength to overcome the incredible weight of this large object. These are solid cast iron affairs. To prove the point, the door was brought up to the surface and placed on the dive boat deck. One by one the sailors each tried to lift it. Not one of them could. Why couldn't they lift it when it was laying on the boat deck? They have no angels willing them on. God no longer sees the emergency. There is no pressure to save someone's life. We need to be in that situation to summon the strength perhaps. Or we overlook a simple truth. Metal has some buoyancy and weighs its volume, 1kg per cubic decimetre, less when submerged in water.

Our Reality

The red rectangle appears to be in front of the blue one. We can see grey dots in between the black squares. What you see is a mix of truth and imagination. Light goes in your eyes correctly, but that information is not accurately conveyed to the perception arena in your mind. Seeing is supposed to be believing. However, do you believe there are grey dots in the avenues between the black squares? Do you believe the red rectangle is closer to you than the blue one? If we can be fooled by illusions, how much faith can we put in our reality? We certainly live in our own personal reality. Everyone's set of colour receptors are different. What you see is different to what others see.



Technology has helped those born with no vision and those that are unable to hear. This technological help doesn't provide an instant transformation akin to turning on a television though. Patients aren't suddenly granted a full colour picture with sublime sound. Implants provide the source, but the mind needs to learn to see and learn to decipher sounds. All of us did when we were

young. We learned to hear and learned to see. It takes time to comprehend and make sense of the world.

Think about pictures and photographs. Do you instantly recognise what is being depicted every time? Most pictures will give us no trouble whatsoever, but some are such that we can't determine what the picture is of. We have to look at it for a while or enlarge it in order to make sense of it. We may then re-see it entirely. A shape shifting transformation happens right before our eyes. We don't have the capacity to take in every pixel of what is available. We can also see things that are not there, temporarily.

Fog can create a speed illusion. The fog alters our perception of speed making it feel as though we are driving slower than what we are. Hence in fog, many of us find ourselves driving at a higher speed than intended. We think the moon gets bigger when it is lower on the horizon. We make lots of judgement errors. We recall key points rather than memorise every word of a story. We understand the gist of something as opposed to memorising every piece of data. Some of the data is stored, some is omitted, some is condensed. We learn to live with errors that lead to us to mishear, mis-see things. We accept errors occur. However, we take offence when our rational thinking is called into question. Our imagination can create and fill in what we want to see. Our imagination can filter out what goes against our beliefs.

Life is not as it seems. We live by feelings. Things create an impression. We form emotive attachments rather than detailed characterisations. Whilst there is plenty of opportunity to get things wrong, some people are loath to admit they are wrong. We do not like our sanity is called into question. Any mistake we make originated in the mind, did it not. Anything we get wrong relates to our mind, one way or another. That can be because we didn't look closely enough or didn't pay enough attention or stored a memory poorly.

We make spelling mistakes. We acknowledge them with little fuss. If we drop something, we just put it down to our fallibility, an accident. Spelling errors, breaking things unintentionally are caused by an error of sorts somewhere 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.

Many areas of the mind process what we see. Combined they form a visual system. We rely on more than the small area connected to our eyes. There is a continuous flow of information back and forth between these different areas with experience resources aiding the process. Our experiences aid our understanding of what is around. Using our experiences gleaned from seeing things in the past we are able to fathom what we are

seeing much quicker. However, this system is error prone. Our experience puts what it thinks ought to be there. Our sight is inventive at times. We therefore need to determine whether the information was seen, imagined, or contrived. Most of the time this all works well. Fatigue can set in. Random chaos can interrupt the normal process of laying down memories. The biggest error we can make of all, is the belief that we remember things correctly all the time.

Much of what you witness turns out to be imaginary. Our mind fills in countless blanks. It fills it in with what we would expect or are accustomed to seeing. Our belief that things are real is tested when our minds fuse reality with imagination. Part truth mixed with part fantasy – along with countless inconsistencies.

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. We might believe that our sight system is as perfect as any camera, and we always interpret what enters our eyes accurately. If only that were the case. Eyewitness accounts have been shown to contradict videographic evidence.

People have stayed awake for days at a time. Dreams overlay reality, most vividly. If you want to experience what it is like to have a ghostly encounter, you can do the same. Stay awake for two, three days. Hallucinations will begin. These bizarre sightings give you a deep understanding of how your imagination mingles with the information entering your eyes.

Regular habits lay down strong pathways in our mind. 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 has been given a name, *déjà vu*. It is nothing supernatural, the mind doesn't behave in a reliable consistent fashion all the time.

Our friends are more than just a name. They have a set of habits. They have an image. We store lots of information about people. Lots of associations embedded including time points, smells, and events we went to. When one of these associations are brought to the fore you may think of your friend. Therefore, it should not be that astonishing if that friend pays you a visit or phones you soon after. A subconscious prediction is 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." The mind is a machine that has a hazy, imprecise method of operation. It is in

flux. It builds, repairs itself, and degrades. It is a mush in the physical and metaphorical sense. We notice oddities. The missing brick in the wall, the different colour of one object, something that happens less frequently.

How do we know for sure we are awake? This edition fails to answer that simple question. We know in ourselves that we are not dreaming right now. Some might argue that we can pinch ourselves and feel the pain. I am certain that I have experienced pain whilst dreaming though. I have dreamt about dreaming. I know I am dreaming in part because it feels different somehow. Many events in the dream are not possible in the awake world. That provides a reasonable clue to the fact that I am dreaming. I have made sensible calculations, mathematical calculations that differed-not to the ones I make when fully awake. Dreaming and imagining are related. We assume that all that we see is played out in reality whereas what we see is rather contrived in our heads. Our existence is a mixture of sleepwalking, active participation in the world about us, and imagining, dreaming. The answer to the question of whether we are awake or not lies in the understanding that going to sleep is a mode of operation. We are still influenced by sounds, temperature, and movement. Our senses do not shut down, we simply ignore them more when asleep. Our attention is shifted from interaction using our body to focusing on interaction with our imagination.

Risk and Luck



You can worry about this, you can worry about that, you can 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. The number of people that have had accidents whilst putting on their trousers is unbelievable.

We could endeavour to live a life without risk but what is the fun in that. A risk free life may in itself be risky. You may avoid the risk of being rejected but that risks becoming lonely. I could sum it up by saying that if you don't go out to gather food, you risk becoming malnourished. To obtain food you may have to drive somewhere. That entails risk. We can find a way of doing things in a safe a way as possible. We can be alert to the dangers. Not only can we be alert, but we can reduce risks that aren't balanced with sizable reward. Wearing a seatbelt reduces the chance of death immensely but doesn't spoil the fun of the drive that much. Small changes around the home can reduce the risk of fires. I learnt something from sailing. There was a risk of drowning. There was a risk of colliding with rocks. The most common problem, however, was slipping over after taking a shower. Hold on to things when you have wet feet. Hospitals are full of people that have slipped and hit their head on basins.

Some of us do not see the dangers around them. Countless children have died by hanging. They were not hanged for being naughty but because the parents never understood that window blind pull strings are fun to wrap around one's head. Tiny batteries burn holes in a child's stomach. Shallow pools have the same threat to life as falling down a deep well. May I say this to you. Rather than fear every possible scenario, spend a little time examining the most likely threats. Not perceived threats but threats that are statistically relevant.

Bravado brings risk, risk that is usually coupled with a brief sense of achievement and little else. Your bravado ends up being someone else's entertainment. Lots have attempted a jump from a balcony into a swimming pool below. Many managed to hit the concrete floor - quite pleasingly for those that wanted something to talk about. Most will forget your name, sometimes forgetting who it was that made the jump, but they will treasure the story. Bones positioned at comical angles, splinters protruding the skin. The ones that die or survive in a vegetative state add to the hidden tally of those, out of sight out of mind.

One might take a risk in the hope that a little gamble will improve our situation. It often will. We gamble, we bet, we trade and invest. All four seem different but are much the same. The comic that said an investment is a trade gone wrong understood something, something that we can learn from. Learning is key. Each risk is an education. We can learn more from taking risks and failing, than we can from years of schooling. We learn to spread the risk and learn to accept losing. No matter how lucky we are, we can't win them all.

We take a risk when dating. We can be raped. We can be beaten. We can get pregnant. We may find ourselves hit with a false accusation. We can find a long-term lover. We can find magic. I wonder though if there is a correlation between attractiveness and risk. The more outwardly attractive someone is, and the more desirable they seem, the more likely we are to be damaged by them. We put trust in them when others knew they are bearers of bad times. We can end up trusting no one, trusting nothing. Our trust evaporated because we didn't bother to gather evidence. A small amount of due diligence, some thought, something can tell us what we need to know. However, some of us won't accept evidence. Some of us are blinded by lust.

Out of sight, out of mind

At the end of every sentence there are full stops. I put them there to represent mundane deaths. Car accidents, falls. These deaths are rarely seen as newsworthy, unlike deaths in plane crashes or train collisions. Ten deaths in one day, on our roads, means very little. Ten deaths in one train crash means much more to us. However, if you die in a novel way, a news reporter may write a little story about it. News reporters tend to flock to the scene, if and only if, lots die, all together in one go. If you are involved, you personally are unlikely to get a mention, but the event will. No matter what the cause of death, it gets a lot of attention if you are famous or infamous. Then you can have a red circle on my ceramic plate. I find it all rather crass. All people are valid to me. And the newsworthiness is very much dependant on the

nationality of those in peril. Tragedies involving poor citizens have much less significance than tragedies involving 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, some will be struggling to get around, but on the whole people seem alive and well. What you don't see, is all the people too ill to leave home. You do not see those laid up in hospital. It gives a false impression that all things are alright. Many people are 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 she 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. There is a limit to the precision at which you can measure the trajectory of an object. There will be rounding errors. Those approximations make it impractical to predict whether an object will head left or right after a collision. Each object you track might have its path interfered with by other entities. That includes spontaneous radioactive decay. The numbers involved in the computations are beyond huge. Instead of predictability we have probability. Randomness with most reliable statistical chance of a certain outcome.

Accurate simulations rely upon something that is impossible to overcome; You need hundreds of atoms to store the data regarding each atom you are tracking. You need to specify its position relative to other atoms, its velocity, and its temperature. To map one atom, you need more than atom to store the data. That is an unsurmountable problem. Treating a tennis ball as one object rather than a collection of gazillions of atoms introduces errors. These errors count in the real world. Fate is a nonsense.

How can we explain away fate? It sure seems like people were fated to meet, fated to get a job, or fated to die young. You have interests in a certain field based on your inbuilt preferences. You will notice vacancies with your curiosity mechanism. Hence, you were set from birth to be drawn into certain occupations. 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 of us, to increase the chance of romance blossoming we can tidy ourselves 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. We can make our own luck by doing things that increase the probability of meeting the one for us.

Was it inevitable that you and your partner got together? Many random chance events led to the initial encounter for sure, but you select according to your inbuilt affinities. Your inbuilt affinities determine who you end up with. Some you rule out point blank. Some people you grow fond of over time. Whatever the case there are things that chime and things that jar. Nothing will change that. We get the impression that fate played a role, but our fixed affinities did most of the work. If you didn't go out on a particular night, would you still have met on another night? Most of us tend to meet in places that we all go to regularly anyway, institutions, workplaces and so on. A singleton is on the lookout for another singleton. Our body language gives off signals. A coupling may appear fortuitous but there was always some inevitability to it. Luck is a wonderful thing. Luck stands out, we notice luck. It has such a big impact on us, whether that is when it is giving or taking things away. If you didn't get that luck, you wouldn't credit fate. There are a lot of things that could have happened but didn't. One night, you may decide to flip a coin. Go out, stay in - based on heads or tails. If you use a mechanical device to flick the coin, it will land the same way every time. Portents are at the mercy of human trickery.

Fate would take quite a lot of planning. God needed to get Laura's parents together, encourage her conception and guide her towards me. Her role was to inspire and annoy me profusely. God then needed to do the same for dearest Megan. He then had to provide me with someone who drew me out of the pit of despair in time for me to do what I wanted to do.

Early deaths befall some of the most beautiful people on earth, many of which never paid much attention to the main risks that lurk unnoticed around them. Not noticing a bald tyre leaves you at the mercy of a blowout. The tyre may fail when you are not travelling very fast, and the incident is rather benign. However, luck may intercede, and the tyre failure can cause your vehicle to plough into oncoming traffic. A bald tyre affair gives rise to, when not if. When is key. When something else compounds the problem, the result can be most unwelcome. The compounding effect is notable. You may die in a house fire one day. An electrical

fault may start the fire, but one thing leads to another. Having a decent fire extinguisher could be a great help. A mask gives you a chance as acrid smoke kills many, mostly those that didn't wake up because they failed to maintain a fire warning device.

Balance being a killjoy with dying for a small joy. Are you aware of your surroundings and ready to react to someone else's recklessness? Are you one to stop and consider safety before turning on a do-in-yourself power tool. People say you only live once. I say you only die once, and if it is well before you have had your fill it is not luck. I may be a boring damp squib sort, but I have dived amongst magnificent reefs, piloted small planes looping the loop and aggravated a spin, planted trees, refurbished my homes, skied slippery slopes, rode horses, surfed, shot thirty thousand clays, had eight thousand hours of tantric style sex, poured many a casting at eleven hundred degrees, floated in the dead sea, walked in the last of the rainforests and lots more. Risk with reason. Risk with hesitation prior. Some of us only come alive when taking risks. We decide how fast, how close, how much more we can push things. Our dedication to detail and good decision making allows us to repeat it tomorrow.

Pins arranged evenly spaced, triangular shape, balls drop down bouncing left right producing a bell curve at the bottom. This portrays our life - with more than one tringle in play. Your triangles overlap other peoples' triangles. The overlap can cause a collision, sometimes a grievous car collision, or you spend the rest of your life with someone that has hit upon you. Shift the triangles to alter your fate. You can change the chance of something happening.

Nothing surpasses buying a child yet more plastic. You don't want children playing with toys for longer by giving them wooden, felt or metal ones as that labours their senses. So long as they look different and feel the same. Some are cut into primary shapes and include a dodecahedral skeleton with respective orifices in which to push these shapes through. This is mating. We find the suitable match that suits our personal shape. Some you would hope and expect to fit but fit they do not. Toddlers have gnawed on some with their teeth, barring their entry. Others were left by the fire and melted, distorted by the heat. Some of us were destined to be cast aside. Often because an imperfect fit is hard to swallow.

Could my fate be at the mercy of an insect flapping its wings in a distant land? No, or to be precise, unlikely. Systems have 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 the waves tiny insects make.

An accident hurts. An accident can cause us to suffer in hideous ways. It takes a long time to heal after a serious accident. We



might not be the same after. These factors weigh on our assessment of risk. 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 fall victim to some calamity 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 you face, it can look quite alarming. A potential recourse; invest in yourself. 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. All hospital treatments have risks attached. Medical treatments are not always heaven sent, but a day tragically spent. You put your life in the hands of the doctors, anaesthetists, and nurses. Once you give the go ahead you are not in control. We know the dangers of driving but if we are at the wheel, we see it as a part of our own destiny, so it doesn't bother us so much.

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. 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 straight away. Then we reverted to; stabilise, then wait a while before operating further.

People in impoverished regions are the most susceptible to the problem of clubfoot. They also have the least money to do anything about it. Sufferers are stigmatised alongside the difficulties walking and working. In rich 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 to deal with the deformity and went to investigate. Rather than slice open the legs, break the bones, and set them straight, they found that a patient's legs 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 non-invasive, but it is also 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

We spot patterns in data; we think they have significance. They may seem noteworthy, but many patterns have no significance whatsoever.

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 3 1 2 5 5 5 0 9 0 9 2 2 1 7 5 4 5 8 4 8 6 4 3 2.

Can you spot anything that stands out in this string of numbers? I put sections in that stand out. I put them in, on purpose to demonstrate a point. You can find patterns in strings of numbers, even ones that were spewed out by a random number generator. The curiosity machine in your head looks for patterns. It prefers neatness. Untidiness can be bothersome. We spot the unusual. We spot something amiss. One black grain of sand dents a creamy beige beach. Curiosity spots it. Curiosity is a hole in our knowledge. It interrupts the flow. A lack of neatness interrupts the visual flow. We get an urge to rectify it. A lack of knowledge or a lack of neatness distracts us.

This obsession with making things neat extends to neat gardens, neat piles, and tidiness in general. The attraction to neatness. Most of us suffer from it. Helpful to some degree but a catalyst for strife. You want it neat; I like it a little unrestrained. Some will throw all their cutlery 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 it makes it easier to locate things quickly. I tell you; philosophy is about the everyday. Those making it seem more than that are leading you astray.

Neatness can have a practical purpose. There is a logical reason for neatness, however, if we look at the natural world our obsession with neatness is grim. We will not accept that nature knows best. We plant trees in rows, often the same variety with little diversity. We remove plants that aid the soil. We trim to make things suit our cosmetic petulance. Were we to set the lens such that we view the natural world from a distance, we could see the beauty. Or zoom in and view the microscopic elegance. Things in the natural world thrive best when left alone from human ordering.

Games and gambling

Rather than working for a coal mining corporation or getting my hands oily fixing cars, I thought that perhaps I could make a living betting on horses instead. If I studied the subject comprehensively there might be a way. There was a way, but it meant limiting the bets to about ten races a year when the odds are in my 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, and as a result the skill of the punters lowered 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 some worthy causes.

A coin flip, two possibilities, heads, or tails. I bet on heads and receive double the stake - if it comes up heads. If it comes up tails, I lose. You could bet on both heads and tails and come out losing nothing, winning nothing. Equally you could place proportional sized bets on every horse in a race. Whatever horse wins you will get a set sum back. Unlike the fairness in the heads or tails game, the racecourse bookmakers are not so kind-hearted. To win ten no matter which horse wins, the total of all the bets on each horse totals more than ten. You may have to stake twelve. That extra two is the overround. The higher the overround the less you get when you win.

In general, the more runners there are in a race the higher the overround. It is easier to hide the size of the overround when there are more horses in a race. Seven is the point where it begins to get very unfavourable for the punter. Prestigious racecourses tend to set a lower overround. At low-ranking events you have more low-income hapless people placing tiddly bets hence the overround needs to be high to make it worthwhile for the bookmaker to stand there all day. A handicap race is designed to

even out the field. That is not at all good for a professional punter. Jumping over hedges is exciting but too much good money is lost when horses you back pull up or throw the rider off. 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. To make a profit, bet just a few times a year on very specific races. Namely prestigious events, with a small number of runners and on horses that are on form.

People claim to have systems that turn a profit. 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 with skill, but over the long course of play those with the most skill and patience lose the least. Some can profit 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 their losses and expenses.

The fruit machine effect is a huge trap. You keep feeding it as you believe it will pay out soon. The more you 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, clenching to the hope that one will turn up. You find yourself wishing that you had walked instead.

The steal and share game. If one person selects steal and the other share, the thief gets it all. If both choose to steal, they both get nothing. If both elect to share, they split the prize. Those that opt to steal are faced with all or nothing. Those that opt to share are faced with half or nothing. Bad people focus on all or nothing. That is far more inviting than half or nothing. Those that think the world ought to be fair, just, and decent are happier with the half or nothing option. They walk away pleased with themselves. They believe that good will overcome evil eventually. It will, but not in our lifetime.

If you only get the chance to play this steal or share game once, you may act differently to when you get to play once a week. If you play regularly, the co-operation strategy can be fruitful. An array of strategies are on offer. Some entail reprisals, others ignoring times when you are a sucker. Most people 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 using 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 the sign states, maximum 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. People like helping. Do they help others so that they get something in return. Maybe, but not always. Nor is it always a subconscious duty. People usually feel good when they are kind, caring and generous. Co-considerational selfishness. 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 from giving it away than I ever would spending it on myself." Selfishness is a double-edged sword with the greater gain made when giving in so many cases. Some people make you feel appreciated. Others less so. Occasionally, helping out lands us in trouble. When we lose out from helping, it can be a bit off putting but nevertheless we tend to keep on doing it. We may have to co-operate to survive, but in most cases, we co-operate because it is joyous. You can't place a number on the joy you get from being a fantastic person. Imbecilic scientists put numbers on human behaviour. They are silly, silly, silly. I give. I get reward. Not money, but a chemical reward in my head. I don't give, I feel guilt, or not. Or a little awkward and embarrassed. Or shamed. Or whatever. Retarded morons put numbers on our actions to compute foolish game theories.

Losing

The first time I visited a casino I got bored, so I 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. They say money won is twice as sweet as money earned. That can be the allure with gambling. A little gambling is fun but some of us are in denial

about the true cost. Lives are ruined. Families suffer. 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. Losing dents our pride. Some get quite annoyed, visibly so, when they lose. The winner sees your frustration and takes pleasure from that. Hence, losing gracefully on the surface avoids handing someone the win and the gratification of seeing you squirm. We beat ourselves up when we lose. We fret about what we did wrong. What did we learn. How can we improve for next time. What did we do well. Think about what you did right. In many matches you will have done a lot more right than wrong. It is difficult to avoid berating yourself though as 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 stretched out a hand to take a portion. I filled a bucket for them, then a barrel, then what seemed like a reservoir. It was all handed over to them gladly. It was spent wisely, fully accountably, thanking me with investigations and compliance checks recurrently.

War

One war finishes and another one starts. That is how it has always been - for millennia bar the occasional interlude. That interlude runs to about three years per hundred. It is rare for there to be complete peace the world over. However, looking at it another way, most people have been at peace most of the time. Not everyone has been fighting one another all the time. Far from it. Most wars are localised rather than pan global. Most individuals are simply not interested or prepared to fight one another. There is a lot of respect for other people's desire to live. The majority have no wish to kill. The cause of the fighting? Sometimes religion, but more often it is to dominate land and resources.

We are not all born killers. Most of us find it quite hard to kill someone. The means by which we kill can make quite a difference. We can drop a bomb or fire 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 at killing. They may enjoy it 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 war time experience, leading to a troubled life afterwards with many taking their own life to escape the pain. Visualisation techniques can help a determined person overcome the awful memories to some degree, but this is an area few armies concern themselves with.

We may think that we would never harm another, never kill, or maim. However, with authority from up high, in an environment away from normal life and given the right motivation, we can all be turned into pernicious individuals. 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. Those that claim that they would never show aggression nor fight another have not experienced

being under siege. If someone breaks into your home threatening the lives of your family, you can be most protective. Your reaction would be surprising, even to yourself, when reviewed in the calm days later. With the right incentive or 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. Seeing someone being killed in front of us, in a cold calculated way, can be the most disturbing. More haunting perhaps than during a confusion of fighting. Those in a firing squad can see the pain and anguish on the face of the victim. They see the terror in the eyes. Executing someone is grim. Blindfolds - or shooting from behind attenuates this issue.

Armies can get bogged down, stalemate - where there is a gradual erosion of forces and the one that endures the longest prevails. Hit and run guerrilla tactics, over long periods of time also wear down all but the most patient fighting forces in the end. A coup, an invasion, trouble, oppression. Send in a small army and there will be losses. Muster a ginormous fighting force and the troublemakers may capitulate. They may give up without a fight when faced with such an overwhelming force and tiny odds of surviving. Armies make a lot of threatening noise 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.

One clown remarked: 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 plus years 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, lost in an instant. Learning mathematics, cookery, deportment, morals you name it. All lost. Everything right down to the spelling tests that

your teachers insisted was so important to do well at. Gone. Twenty or so years of effort, not two.

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. 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

Different wars, different casualty rates. In some wars more succumbed to disease than enemy fire. There are instances where people can be at a greater risk from some jeopardy at home than in the location of war. There have been many battles where thousands of people took part, but only a few died.

Venom is unleashed when we pull the trigger. Arms are severed, intestines gurgle - exposed to the air, throats are removed, skulls are cracked, genitalia are liquified and the purpose of people's lives is laid bare. Progress of sorts is made. A move closer to something. The progress feels more akin to a backward step if you made a mistake in your aim. You fired on a friend. You knew them quite well as you slept in the same quarters and hiked together to confront your enemy. A sentimentalist is most perturbed by losses caused by their own militia. Battles are waves of violence where individual acts of bravery help a side prevail. Perfection would be preferred but mistakes will be made, mistakes caused by confusion, miscommunication, or misjudgement. To put out a fire you run to the river and return hauling a bucket of water. Much is spilt. However, so long as you have enough to douse the flames the job is a good one. One is not sentimental about the poor water that never fought the flames. We dwell on efficiency and waste, whilst those with political control tabulate the overall picture. The past is the past and unchangeable, the future is what excites those playing the war game.

Something makes us believe that a battle is justifiable. Others see the stated justification as an excuse. The will to fight is all - belief in a higher purpose. Hope. Public opinion is manipulated to keep the merry dance going. People are coerced to believe that conscription is both necessary and righteous. Men can be

pressured to fight whilst women are given a free pass. It is not a meritocracy. If a woman is clearly stronger than some of the men, she will get a free pass. That applies in some areas of the world. In others, both men and women fight. They both fight effectively. Should I go or should I run for the hills? I could be seriously injured. I could die. I could live with myself better if I take part. Some will appreciate me there and appreciate my efforts on my return. Do I believe the war to be the right course of action?

Killing people one way is an act of war. Killing people in another way is thought of as terrorism. Killing people with some weapons is deemed dastardly yet killing the same number with another weapon provokes little outrage. Terrorists take attention seeking to the extreme. Their actions may not align with any government. The aim is to align with public opinion, be heard and be relevant. When the media plays into the hands of the agitators, they increase the weight of the message. If such events are downplayed, then support will drop. Only if the frustration of not being heard rises to much and therefore action is taken to raise the ante significantly, does this policy become risky.

Earthquakes and other natural disasters can wipe out thousands of people in one go. Preventable curable diseases eradicate millions every year. Yet what do we focus the most attention on? Quite often the relatively small numbers killed in a terrorist attack. Use of legal guns and knives destroy lives daily. Add in the preventable fatalities on our roads 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 nothing to lose, fear evaporates. Dying 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. They 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 all, 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 may be admirable but you won't be around to appreciate any of the gains that come from your side being victorious. Is it worse to die in a war your side wins or one 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.

We won. You watch the celebrations take place. People are jubilant. It feels joyous. But for some it is bittersweet. Their partner is dead. Their body is badly damaged. Their mind is mangled. It is the ultimate sacrifice to die in war say those that toy with other people's game of life. If one has a duty to serve, those imposing the duty have a duty of care. We may have little control over the start or cause of a war but have plenty of control over how we conduct operations. Whilst small armies have defeated much larger ones, it helps to have as many as possible assisting your cause. Thus, should all take part when your nation is under attack?

Body

Fashionable diets. Feel-good diets. Pretentious diets. Diets cutting out this, cutting out that. Diets with more of this in replace of that. A diet recommended today is one that replaced a diet recommended yesterday. There is a diet that stands the test of time. It works for everyone. It is simple. It is based on evidence. It is called the varied diet. Plain and simple variety. Longevity is aided by a diet that is varied. Truly varied. Not too much, not too little. Eat lots of vegetables. Eat spices. Eat herbs. Eat wholefoods. Eat delights. Those on this varied diet might not need to take supplementary pills, besides whilst many proclaim their wonderful positive effects, many are not absorbed well by our bodies in the same way as food anyway. The varied diet, the best diet on earth bar none.

Some food on offer is produced in bulk. It is sieved and strained removing things that are good for our bodies. Items are added to stop it congealing, flaking, or separating. Items are added to make it addictively tasty. Eat you may with little ill effect - so long as you do not overindulge. This type of food, junk food, is not always bad per se for what it contains, but for what it doesn't contain. Avoid getting these delicious, fabulous foodstuffs from the same place too often. Once a week is fine. Lots of different food is the key.

If one mineral is lacking in the soil, plants do not grow as tall. Leaves ought to be glowing green, but the lack of nutrients makes them dismally yellow. Plants will look feeble and listless if they can't get what they need to grow. Vital does not mean optional, nor preferable. It means needed for proper function, hence the name vital-amines. People have proved how vital certain vital things are through self-experimentation. They washed out key minerals from their meals and in short order came close to death. The greater the variety in our diet, the more chance we have of getting all the nutrients that we need to maintain our bodies.

You can do an in-depth study of what to eat. Alternatively, you can relax and let the varied diet take good care of you. Simply seek out variety. Make it broad, eat a wide range of foodstuffs. Lots of small portions rather than big heaps of one thing.

Some foodstuffs provide what we need but may not align with our taste buds. This invites a change in behaviour. You might need to find the gall to stop rejecting foods based on their taste or lack of. These less pleasant foods can help your body repair itself and help you stay in good shape. Rather than rejecting food that is beneficial, consume a little, get it down your gullet and be done with it. Even munching a small amount of salad, vegetables, fruit, and such like, gives your body a chance of getting what it needs.

Some is much better than none by far. Some foods are disgusting say you. Disgust is a thing most often learnt from our parents. Did you find it disgusting by trying it for yourself. We can shape chocolate into squares, balls, bells, or cute animals. We can also shape chocolate in such a way that it closely resembles a dog turd. Children will happily pick it up and eat it. However, at a certain age they will shy away and declare a chocolate turd to be disgusting. Why, because they copied others. Eat a variety. Eat a little of that which you are not fond of. Eat some drab alongside the gorgeous.

The varied diet requires moderation to work well. That means avoiding the damage caused by too much. Eating too much of something can wreak havoc to essential parts of our body. We can tolerate a certain amount of toxicity. However, if we consume too much of one thing, we are liable to do some permanent damage. People have died eating too many carrots or drinking too much water, items that are generally considered to be good for you. Some toxins build up. A few μg here, some there, and before long, our organs are overwhelmed. If you vary what you eat you lower the probability of that happening. Eating the same thing over and over ends up being disastrous for our health.

A variety reduces the probability of damaging your organs through overdose. A valid variety guarantees that you get enough of what you need. The simplicity of the diverse diet allows for a few wayward habits, which is fine. After all there is a claim that happier people live longer than miserable ones. You can compensate for your wayward habits by including more natural foods, real bread, brown rather than blanched white and less factory foods. Don't be a cheapskate, food is medicine, buy the best where you can. A life free of illness is priceless.

Co-considerational selfishness plays a part in what we eat during pregnancy. If we eat well, our baby will develop well. A child that has been allotted the required building blocks will behave better, be better and less often ill. So, they will be less trouble to you. Anything you make without the essential ingredients becomes a bodge job, and a problem to you later on. Maximise that variety before, during and after you get pregnant.

There may well be more nutrition in the cereal box than the cereal contained within. 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 level of

noxious chemicals in food packaging has steadily increased. Most unpleasant as they leach from the box through the bag into the food inside. Doing good is a belief, with flaws and unpleasant trade-offs.

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. Vary the types of rice you buy.

Variety is paramount but note; People were split into two groups. 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 and the more options on offer, the more tempting it is to eat more. Use smaller plates. Use the power of inconvenience. If people need to get up and move across the room to add more to their plate they may eat less. Much less than if there is a mound of food in easy reach on the table. Sensible amounts of a variety is the aim.

If you want to reduce your body weight you could attend meetings once a week. You could change what you eat. You could change the time of day that you eat. You could be conned into believing that a miracle diet scheme will solve the problem. Alternatively, you could eat less. Eat half what you habitually eat. Same variety, just much less of it. That will work for sure. Less is easy. Less is safe. Less is cheap. Less is best. Less is easy to gauge. Show me one picture of an overweight person held in a wartime prison camp. If you can show me one, then I will show you a thousand people unsettlingly thin. They ate less than usual and shed weight rapidly.

The body has a certain amount of elasticity. Fat cells fill up like balloons. When over stretched, they split into two and the body's capacity to hold fat 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.

The bigger we become the less inclined we are to get up and do. Fat and lazy have a direct correlation. There is very little correlation between more exercise and weight loss, aside from it giving your less time to eat snacks. Exercise will make you fitter

and stronger – nothing else. If you want to be fitter, go for a walk or jog around the park. If you want to lose weight, eat less.

Sticking to plants

Have you ever heard someone complaining about a piece of meat? When they complain about it being gristly, tough or devoid of any flavour, my response to those ungracious sorts is to tell them that when they die, we will eat them and complain about the fat, the toughness of their skin and rancid nature of their inner thighs. There is a thought that we can manage quite well with a diet comprising fruit, nuts, vegetables and so on – a diet devoid of animal entrails. Lions and tigers, whales and sharks don't have this luxury.

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. Some people keep their meat consumption down to a minimum. 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.

Animals are kept in crates, unable to stand up. Some in pens and unable to turn around. Some have their offspring taken away from them after a day or three. Some live in cages and never see the light of day but must endure the constant cacophony of the other ill valued souls. Some are forced fed so that their liver swells up ten times the normal size. Some are made to swim in circles in insipid waters. Some have their fins sliced off and then thrown back to die slowly, excruciatingly painfully. Humans are not man-kind but man-vile. Some get caught in bits of fishing gear. Some are kicked about as if they were a football. The only goal is to compete on price and disrespect.

We can be equally disrespectful and uncaring in the way we cause misery to pets. Some are stored in tiny boxes that get dreadfully 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 but prefer it if our pets stop roaming,

exploring, and enjoying life. A thousand chickens or two hundred sheep are reared and killed to sustain one pet cat. How many animals have been killed to gratify you? It is made so easy. Others do the rearing for us. Others massacre them and others hack their carcasses to shreds to make cuts to cook. We learn little of the suffering and turn a blind eye to it.

Teenage rebellion led a child to scold an elder for eating meat. The elder spoke eloquently about leading by example rather than being so pushy. Activism can put an end to torturous practices, especially practices that have been kept hidden. Activists are usually hypocritical. Can we justify hectoring others when parts of our own life contradict our message. 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 of meat we decline is a move in a more compassionate direction. One could reduce their meat consumption to once per week and live desirably.

Vital-amines are vital and not easily obtained without recourse to eggs and cow's milk. Those on a purely plant-based diet will suffer countless health repercussions. Memory loss, cognitive function decline, tiredness, weakness, brittleness and many other debilitations. Your health matters, presumably. The life an animal has before they are killed matters greatly too, to anyone with a heart and soul. Moderation, compassion and minimising the harm perhaps. Slitting the throat of an animal when alert and fully conscious is a filthy practice.

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 gene synthesising mitosis occurred. Our blueprints are constantly being copied, sometimes incorrectly. Hence, identical twins never develop identically. Pollution, radiation, toxins and more, damage us. Nevertheless, poor diets are the most widespread cause of poor body development. You are what you eat.

Scented candles, chemicals heated to fill the air with a noticeable aroma. Scents added to washing liquids, paints, fire retardants and so on bombard our body every day. One lemony scented item is not likely to do you much harm. Exposure to low levels of one item is rarely a problem. Exposure to a cocktail of toxins is more damaging. Compounds compounding. It is hard to avoid all exposure, but we can reduce it. We can squirt the minimum amounts 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. Changes occur, all of a sudden. One day you hear a low gruff voice reverberating in the house. It is not a visitor, but a voice broken overnight. When a seemingly normal child has other transformations that appear like everything has gone awry, we look for a cause. We are startled by the suddenness. 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. Trigger points are laid out in our genome which switch states and noticeable changes take place.

The joy of a bed

Have a bath, smooth out some clean sheets. Feel the moment of joy as you splay your legs and arms beneath the covers - ready to purge the mind of things it thinks it has no future need for. It will condense and sort the remainder. Failure to do this results in confusion and tiredness throughout the days to follow. While you are fast asleep, you are oblivious to the billions of others beavering away. You are dead to the world each night. However, the world can toy with your dreams. They can be shifted in a new direction by a light touch or unusual sounds.

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 people's probable responses, you are likely to be doing so well into the night. Thus, we can say to ourselves that this issue can be dealt with tomorrow. There is no need to think about it right now. We can force a routine; a thinking path that helps us drift off. The same thought path works each night. A yarn of your own making that you talk yourself through.

There may be a stigma attached to sleeping by oneself, alone. It is in fact a fashion that comes and goes but of course relies on having a home with enough rooms for that to be possible. Sleeping alongside someone is a joy too when that someone is rather lovable. However, being sleep disturbed for years on end, by snoring, fidgeting etc can dampen our happiness.

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. 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 with their activities. We may endeavour to fit in with society but need not follow the same precise pattern as everyone else.

We do the same but in a different order or at a different time in the day.

Our dreams are sometimes related to the goings on in our life. I was plagued by nightmares for years. I would experience a small horror, then a bigger one. I felt the relief if it was to be a small horror, but well aware that a large one may soon follow. Whilst semi-incomprehensible, it was vivid. I felt the sheer terror of archers firing arrows at my face resulting in mounds of bubbling gunk. Many years passed before I realised that these correlated to some small mistake or large thing I had done wrong. The fear of failure. Pressure from inflexible characters. Only a new life away from home allowed these to fade. I still live through bad dreams, but they take a different form and only occur when too hot or after eating excessively spiced food late in the evening. The worst: 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 one can spend a few frustrating minutes trying to re-engage the body. Semi-awake, semi asleep.

The less pleasant dreams are dwarfed by the rather marvellous ones. Flying high and moving 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 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.

Symptoms, solutions and causes. We are more interested in finding solutions than causes. The solution to bed wetting is nappies regardless of age or bedding to handle the urine. The cause maybe stress or pressure from demanding parents – having too great expectations. Most will stick to solutions and not tackle the cause believing that a child will grow out of it. Often the symptoms change, reinforcing the belief that all is fine.

Pain

Got pain, take pill. Got pain take nothing for it. Monitor it subside. It is only pain. I had six fillings with no anaesthetic. I recall leaving the dentist afterwards feeling rather good. No grogginess to put up with for the rest of the day. I was proscribed antibiotics and pain killers when I had a tooth abscess. I elected to take neither. The pain went on for two weeks. It got so bad I nearly keeled over when I stood up too quickly. However, I could feel it getting slightly less dreadful each day. I longed to crunch on some nuts

but ate slippery things instead. I vowed that I would never take eating crunchy glee-bombs for granted again. That vow slowly evaporated as we need constant reminders of what can go wrong for that to stick.

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. Feel it we won't, as we listen to those that recant horror stories, those that experienced pain that left a long-lasting impression rather than those that managed to embrace the pain. We are all different, we tolerate pain differently. Nevertheless, we are inclined to listen to the wrong people at times. Women reach a certain age when their hormone levels subside. They wake up at obscure times in the night feeling rather hot and sweating profusely. Medicine is proffered, but less talk of handling it medicine-free. Feel it I say. It is an experience that will come and go. Feel the sensations. Have a little read and put your blankets back over yourself when you cool down. Note how over the weeks and months it reaches a peak then subsides. Replace your fear and distress with interest in your body changing. When confronting natural hormonal changes the altercation can be accepted with no medical intervention. Medicine free is usually safer in the short term, medium term and longer term. Attitude makes a world of difference. We must listen to our bodies. In this case, sleep disruption will ensue. Serious sleep disruption. For these few golden years, the body must take priority over work and social interactions. Sleep in, for as long as needed, every day. Rearrange things around what your body is telling you. These are not normal times. Things will return to the old normal, be patient. Explain things to others and seek understanding.

One thing I learned the hard way: 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. Rest after an injury is good, but rest when muscles need strengthening is not good. 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.

A pill to alleviate the cause of the pain is distinct from a pill to hide and mask the pain. Pain killers can be addictive. Pain killers come with side effects. Pain killers do not speed up recovery, quite often they will lengthen the recovery. Pain killers can bring about new forms of pain in other areas. Some are born without the ability to feel pain. They break things. Lots of things, lots of bones

and tendons. That gives you a clue. The pain killer removes the opportunity to adjust things to lower further damage. Pain can tell you to stop, to slow down, to adjust. Pain killers have a place, perhaps during an operation, but they are best placed out of reach at most other times. Medicine on the other hand can be miraculous.

A capful of apple cider vinegar makes heartburn ten times worse for a few seconds but seems to be a good cure for it. 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 body encapsulates the soul, the spirit. It holds all that forms the essence of you. Until it fails, falls apart and functions no more. The body makes you believe you are more than just a body. The body tricks you into thinking such. The body is a nobody that means all to one body, your body. The body can dream. The body can hope. The body can interact with the things in reach. What it can't do is transcend itself. It is just another body amongst countless others. It could have wings, or gills or eight legs. Each attachment gives it the propensity to explore and feel reward. Bodies have the capacity to delude themselves into believing that they are supreme in the spiritual sense. They prove it by hideous actions on other bodies. By consuming the edible parts. Bodies promote unfairness. Bodies invent morality and tailor it to their advantage. I have shifted my stance as I have aged. I am now a little more inclined to mourn births of human bodies and celebrate their deaths. I once thought that birthing some good bodies could counteract the births of less good ones. However, the prevalence of so many greedy, sinister, neglectful, sickening bodies are too numerous, too persistent and too destructive to counter.

The only way

"You either know it all or have a hole in your argument."

I am not feeling quite so hungry as my dear friend, so I shall give her half of my cake, the bigger half. You know what I mean do you not. You know that I can split a cake in two. You can split it unequally but still regard it as a half. Rather than talk about co-considerational selfishness, me feeling good about giving her a little more of what I have, I want to talk about splitting things. Half a cake is never half a cake no matter what level of precision your scales are. Half a cake is x zillion cake atoms. She gets x zillion cake atoms, I get x zillion cake atoms. Our marvellous imagination can conjure up concepts that make sense to us but have no place in reality. A cat eating a two-storey concrete house. You sure can visualise it, but no cat can munch through steel reinforced concrete.

All non-integer numbers are figments of our imagination. You can only have whole numbers of things. You cannot have half of anything. You can't have a third of anything. Not in physical form. Only by representation. I want 1.5 chickens. You know what I mean, it makes sense. Half a chicken tends to be poultry rather than a functioning bird that takes its place in the pecking order.

A chicken is a congregation of parts. Enough parts in place for us to deem it a chicken. There is plenty of room to be at odds with one another when debating whether a chicken is a chicken or not when it loses its feathers, beak and three of its toenails. Leaving that aside, for a truth is that a collection of parts is a collection of parts. In our living breathing world, we can have parts but not have a minus number of parts. If you have three chickens and a poacher steals four of them, you don't have minus one chickens. Yet in maths these things are seemingly possible. You either have a chicken or you don't. If that were that I would not get too exasperated, but people's imagination can run quite wild.

We have what are called imaginary numbers. They come about from the very sorry concept of taking the square root of a negative number. The square root of four chickens is two. Fine. I can replicate that in my coop. However, I can't take four chickens that were not there in the first place and have minus four chickens, let alone take the square root of them. What does this tell you? It reinforces the idea that we can think of things that are plain silly. Things might well be mathematically possible but what you think ought to be possible can't be replicated in the physical world. The same applies with our vivid imaginations. There are many ideas we can have in our heads that we can't translate into the real world.

When we don't know the answer, we can leave the question open until we discover more. Some however, decide to use their imagination to fill in the gaps. We haven't been able to provide a good explanation as to how the universe came into being. So, people invented something, namely a magnificent creator. The creator idea is no better than trying to take the square root of non-existent chickens and producing infinite eggs by feeding them one basket of wheat.

The universe runs solely on whole numbers. There is magic to simple integer whole numbers. Whole numbers and the properties of them enable you to exist. This is the most complex, most difficulty of all chapters. It takes you on a mini journey, explaining all and everything regarding the universe from true atoms to information and structure. There are simple reasons for why things are as they are. You will see how simple basic building blocks creates complexity. The genius is in the simplicity. A lot of people have wasted time discussing the concept of singularity - the idea of things starting from a decidedly small point and expanding rapidly. The only useful aspect to all this is the word they chose. Singularity. There is another use for that word which leads to a different understanding of the way things are. Single. Sole. Only. One. A single common true atom. A single arena of space. A single flexi-constant and only one way things can be. From one we get congregation, structure and wild complexity. Most complex structures are built with very simple basic building blocks.

Time

Time is one of many human abstracts. An idea. A concept. Wonderful but non-existent. We have plenty of things we can use to represent the so called passing of time, but you know, I know that no one can pick up time. No one can hold time in their hand. Time is just something we believe exists. Time is imaginary.

Let's begin with the history of the concept. Why did someone decide to set 24 as the number of hours in a day? Why not 25 or 30, or some other number? The magic of numbers. It is an inherent magic. One that has profound implications whilst being nothing special. 24 can be divided by 1,2,3,4,6,8,12 evenly. 25 can only be divided by 1 and 5. A small change in the number, in this case one more, 24-25, and things are so different. Simple numbers, small differences, large impact. I will show you the impact. It is huge. The manifestation of all structures in nature, in physics and chemistry boil down to simple facets of integer whole numbers.

How old are you precisely? Every year that passes is not the same length. By length I mean the number of pulses counted in a clock. Water clocks were built long ago to give us a rudimentary way of

counting time. We upgraded those to an electronic circuit containing a quartz crystal. They were superseded by a clock that counts the oscillations of an electron in a caesium atom. Your age is not a number of years, months and days but a number of counts in a clock. We add a day, every so often to a year, to make life unfair for some. Those lucky enough to be classed as born on a leap day get to celebrate their birthday once every four years rather than every year.

Atomic clocks are most accurate except they are not. Put two of them synched, side by side and take one on a journey. When it returns, the time shown on each is different. A change in velocity changes the mass effect thereby changing the relative rate of pulses in any clock.

We measure our age by years that contain a differing number of days, days that get slightly longer each day, with a clock that has inconsistencies. Perhaps those that view time as being a constant fixed reliable entity are people that can pin down what love is and prove that money is real.

We discuss time, love and money as if they are something tangible. Yet they are nothing but human created abstracts. We feel time is a steady, reliable thing. We feel that we live our lives in a segment within a grander continuum. We acknowledge that time is something we can't control. However, we can manipulate the things by which we measure time. The oscillations in the atom that we use to count time passing is affected by acceleration. We could therefore compensate somehow for any acceleration that a clock maybe subjected to. However, we have no reference point. We can't pin down our underlying velocity or acceleration we are being subjected to. We are on a planet that is spinning on an axis that wobbles, in a solar system on the move within a galaxy that is also moving. Where on Earth is standard universal time. Where is the clock that governs the universe? What we can be sure about, is that as something moves from one point to another, a number of oscillations can be counted. Things move a relative distance whilst a number of counts are counted.

Our ideas of the world are based on subjective personal experience. I will give you a simple illustration. The manager asked a new employee to get a job completed by the end of the day. Five o'clock came and went but no work was handed in. The manager called in the employee to explain themselves. There was a look of perplexment on the employee's face. They thought they had until midnight to complete the assignment. The manager assumed all people knew that a day in this context means a working day, nine till five. What you believe to be, ain't necessarily so. The essence of time is one of that many things that we haven't fully thought through.

Clocks are good enough for practical purposes. We can stay in sync with each other accurately enough. Clocks ensure we go to bed at a suitable time. Clocks help us arrive outside a meeting room simultaneously with others so that we can walk in two by two. Clocks aid our life. Yet time is not a thing. When you examine the failings in your understanding of so-called time, you also uncover a range of other things that are also wrong. From there you can get a new understanding of how things are and a new reassurance that you are not wasting your days believing in falsehoods. The only way people can keep you accepting nonsense is if they threaten you with punishments and hardships. Life is a little better when you believe in better.

Speed

If I claim that time is a non-thing, then our thoughts turn to speed. We specify speed as distance travelled, divided by the time taken. Miles per day, kilometres per hour, metres per second. Distance per number of oscillations in the clock. Note that indicated speed depends on whether the clock is moving with the object or being held by a stationary observer. When an object moves, its distance relative to all other objects changes. Two objects on the same path can have differing rates of relative distance change. That rate of relative distance change is speed. Time does not come into it. In other words, something can be moving twice as fast as something else, because the rate of relative distance change is double the other. Oscillations in the clock are not absolute. They vary depending on the motion of the clock. Speed is a comparison not a value. A multiple of relative distance change compared with other objects.

I am sure someone, somewhere, at some point tried to contest a speeding ticket using the claim that the car was travelling at minus 550 miles per hour rather than 50. That would be the case at a certain latitude where the Earth rotates at 600 miles per hour. Speed is relative. There is no definitive speed, but a range of speeds in relation to various points of reference. Your speed in relation to the sun is quite different to the speed in relation to the moon. Clocks placed on different planets will not display the same rate of internal oscillations compared with each other. What we consider to be this point in time, now, is not a fixed point. Now is in constant motion. Yesterday is only an idea. We think of it as where everything was positioned relative to one another previously. There is no back in time, but how things were - the state of things before they all moved. However, there is no record of where every atom was positioned previously. Tomorrow never comes, because when every tomorrow comes that tomorrow becomes today. I will plagiarise a promise; you can have jam

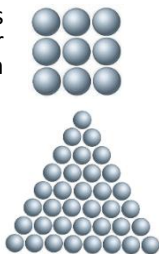
yesterday or tomorrow but never today. Believing in tomorrow will leave you salivating but never eating.

The entropy factor ensures that we are unable to put everything back to how it was. A time traveling machine needs to make time a thing first. Then adjust every atom in the entire universe in way that runs counter to what makes it work in the first place.

Into fruition

Some people are happy with the idea that god made the universe, god is everlasting, has always existed and you are here to spread a message to every corner of the globe. I am not happy or convinced that that is the only possibility. In fact, I think that the universe is not quite as it seems and more to the point did not need a designer. The magic of whole numbers. The only way - how things congregate, how they can only congregate in certain ways. The evidence is all around us showing how simple basic structures produce beautiful complexity. There is an inherent will to form. There are remarkable changes in the properties of chemistry when the numbers change.

Did it take a genius to devise the number series 1,2,3,4,5,6,7 etc? That series leads to some rather joyous facts. One can arrange things neatly with certain numbers of objects. Nine objects can be made into a square, three by three. Thirty-six is more joyous. That number of objects can be arranged into both a square, six by six or a triangle with sides eight-eight-eight. These examples show congregation in one plane. Structures congregate across all planes.



The central object is the central point to the greatest argument of all time. Here in lies the magic of existence. You can only fit six true atoms around a central one – on a single plane. You can only fit twelve true atoms around a central one using all planes. For this reason alone, we can be certain beyond all measure that there is only one way a universe can be created. This implies the phenomenal truth that a universe is not created but comes into being without any need for designing. It needs no designer. You can't fit seven/thirteen around the core, that number will not fit. A lower number leaves room for more. This most elementary policy tells you that there is only one way the universe can be built. No matter what universe were to come into fruition the same numerical issues arise.

God must be a mathematician proclaim those holding on to the vestiges of hope and reason. Alas this is an inherent property of numbers. It takes no mathematical skill whatsoever to devise the rules for patterns. Whole numbers create patterns all by

themselves with no input, no intelligence and no direction whatsoever. Patterns develop by themselves.



One may glance at the patterns objects make when sitting side by side and be rather bemused asking, what if the spheres are of differing sizes? Indeed, or for that matter what if something called 'space time' bends structures? The wizards whip out a strip of paper. They put a twist in this said bit of paper then join the ends. They run their finger along the strip all the way around back to where they started. They will, as if by magic, show that the journey manages to go through the plane of the paper. Magic is never magic but some illusion, some sleight of hand or a thing to trick our inaccurate senses. I take the strip from their grasp and lay it flat upon the table. After drawing two lines along the length, one straight the other zigzagged, I request they join the two lines after performing the twist and linking. The lines meet not. Only one line meets. Only one chain of atoms can link. There is no magical passing through a plane without passing through a plane. It is an optical illusion. Space doesn't bend or warp. Space is space containing forces and fields that do not always follow straight parallel lines. I will come back to the differing size element in a few paragraphs hence. This is a significant thing to consider. For now, focus on the concept of congregation and patterns that form based on numbers involved in the tiling. Squares, cubes, diamonds, pseudo-circles etc.

A circular effect is true and evident. As is a spherical effect. However, a physical circle or sphere is not to be found in the world we live in. Not a true circle that is. As you add more dots to the circular path it becomes, you got it, more circular. Circular is a human concept. Circles are x sided shapes. We give them

names, triangle, square, pentagon, hexagon. The more sides, the better the circle appears to be. No matter how many dots you use you will always have a straight-line path of maximum effect between them. Hence, why Pi (π) is irrational and transcendental. No object is circular. No set of points can ever be truly circular. They will be points on a hypothetical imaginary circle.

True atoms

Whilst some are reading a religious confection, others are reading some romance novel. You are reading this, and I suspect have on at least one occasion pondered about the universe, existentialism and the nature of things. You are quite noticeably not the first. We have documents proposing many poignant things. One such document describes the notion of division, breaking things down into ever smaller pieces. Would it be reasonable, the writer suggested, that we're one to keep breaking something down you would get to a point where you can no longer break it down any further. You would have in your hand the smallest possible thing. That thing was given a name. The atom.

Time passed. The earth changed a little. Progress was made in the scientific arena and atoms were identified. Unbreakable pieces. Lots of different unbreakable pieces. They had different densities. Different levels of mass. They also had vastly different properties. One by one these atoms, which we call elements were isolated and examined. Hydrogen is at number one. It is the lightest, least dense - it has the least mass. These elements were put into a table. From carbon, xenon etc through to gold and uranium, they all had a place. The table had gaps though. Elements that we believed to exist but struggled to isolate. But isolate we did in due course. How did they build the table? How did they predict elements? I tell you. Simple numbers. 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8 etc. Each element is a quantum heavier. Whilst isotopes muddle the story a little, they too fail to defy the quantum policy. They too stick to the solid principle of being concordant with being firmly associated with whole integer round numbers. No fractions are found in nature. Only whole numbers.

We call atoms, atoms, yet they are not unbreakable. They are not the smallest entities that we have in this universe. We were too hasty calling them atoms. The philosopher who coined the term atom made it clear that atoms can't be split. We did not understand at the time that atoms can be broken into smaller discrete pieces. These smaller pieces, sub-atomic particles have been given names, electrons, protons and neutrons. They too can be broken further into even smaller particles and have a variety of names such as muons, leptons and gluons etc. These too can be broken down into something that is indeed the smallest entity

in our universe. This smallest entity can be referred to as the true atom.

True atoms congregate to form elementary particles. Elementary particles congregate to form sub-atomic particles. Sub-atomic particles congregate to form atoms, the elements. Atoms congregate in all manner of ways to give us millions of chemical compounds. Chemical compounds create biology. Extensive carbon chains wrapped in helical twists store lots of information.

Information

The information in your genes sets in motion growth and repair. The information steers the system. The information builds a body, one that thinks it is something more than it is. The data held in those helical structures may lie dormant for a while or be in constant use. That data triggers things by harnessing amplification mechanisms to make things on a bigger scale happen. Proteins are manufactured, eggs are manufactured and placed in place to be fertilised. Data in a computer is not too dissimilar. Electron states represent data which too can trigger something in response to various situations. A few electrons push open a gate allowing vastly more to pass. Those may open another gate or switch that enables ten times, a hundred times, a thousand times more power through. Tiny controls can be amplified in stages to multiply the number of atoms changing state by factors of millions, billions.

Genetic information, computer information is active or potentially so. If I were I to scrawl some words on a piece of paper, I lay down information. Layers of carbon atoms spread on the paper is information. It is inert though. That information represents things that a human or animal may interpret. I suppose one could envisage it triggering a response. Were I to write something along the lines of your wife is having an affair, it may trigger the husband to act. However, there is a difference between information in the form of writing on paper and information held in genes. There is a difference between a photograph printed on paper and computer memory state. A photograph holds information as does writing, but this information is ethereal, it represents, it is there to be interpreted. It is not part of a mechanism like genes are. The point being made here is that information can act on other information. And do so physically. Some forms of information can be responsive and act as a cog in a machine. Information can have entirely different potential depending on the format. Some information is a piece in a system. Other items of information are only atoms laid out to represent things that mean something to various animals.

I can relay information to you via a speaker. As I do so, the air molecules vibrate, collide and a pressure wave travels towards

your ear. I do not add molecules to the room, nor remove any. The information in this example is encoded motion. Information can be the state, position or velocity of atoms. True atoms turn that concept inside out for they are themselves information-esque. Akin to information. A sound wave has no substance, no solidity. True atoms do not have substance nor weight so to speak either. They are after all, incited into inter-action from nothing. True atoms act on other true atoms. True atoms adopt the properties of mass.

Mass

Mass resists change in velocity. Mass resists being accelerated or decelerated. Mass objects to having its course altered. Mass is also attracted to other masses in the weak form, gravity. True atoms take on the behaviour of mass without needing any physical material to make them inter-active. If the point of greatest action within a true atom is static relative to other true atoms it tries to remain so, static. If it is moving relative to other true atoms, the point of greatest action within a true atom likes to remain on the same relative trajectory. True atoms resist changes in velocity.

The more mass an object has, the more force required to accelerate it. More mass, more effort needed to speed it up, slow it down or redirect it. A solid iron ball is harder to throw than one made the same size but made of paper. The iron ball has more mass than the paper one. The iron ball would resist being thrown far more than the paper one even in the vacuum of space. If you heat up an iron ball, it will expand. The volume increases, the density decreases but the mass stays the same. It will not become easier to move, throw, nor stop, if it is hurtling towards you.

True atoms interact with each other with less intensity the further apart they are. They have a spherical zone of inter-action. However, they are not to be thought of as tiny spheres. Nor infinitesimally small point objects, but points of greatest inter-action. Imagine sweeping a metal detector back and forth across the ground and isolating a point where the detector emits the loudest sound. There is a point where the true atom's effect is greatest. They are not strings. They are not balls. They are not sheets. They are emptiness with a severe inclination to resist other true atoms getting too close. If that resistance is overcome, they will unite and, in the process, cause a significant disturbance. That disturbance will radiate outwards affecting other true atoms in range.

The universe is no centralized simulation, for each atom is acting in a unique spot. We are not holographic mirages - despite being formed of nothing more than ethereal substance free true atoms. Holograms have very minimal mass effect. True atoms are more

akin to information than what we feel is physical matter. It can be a help and a hinderance to use the word information in the context of true atoms. It helps in that many forms of information such as encoded waves, pictorial displays etc have no underlying substance. However, it hinders when we think of information as being benign, non-responsive, inactive, created, interpreted, transitory. There is no information as such contained in a pencil. But use that pencil to write something and you have created information.

The blank canvas, namely an empty void, the universe, a vacuum, null, nothing interacting state of emptiness can have interacting true atoms springing into life. From nothing come items with no solidity, made from nothing, that commence interactions between each other. True atoms emulate solidity, mass and forcefulness. They do so in their unique spot. True atoms do not represent information. They are a single piece of data that place a position shifting force on all the others. The universe is nothing but true atoms moving. From explosions, fire, chemistry, bonding, building, it is all true atoms moving, nothing more. High velocities are what we commonly equate as temperature. Fast is hot. Slow is cold.

Hot transfers to cold always. Heat is faster moving atoms. A cold object contains atoms vibrating/moving as a lower average relative rate to a warmer object. When a cold object mingles with a warmer object, the average heat of the formerly cold object rises whilst the average heat of the hotter object falls. Each collision will shift the relative speed of all the atoms towards an equilibrium. Individual warmer atoms may heat up, move faster, after a collision with a slower moving atom. However, there will be more slowing down than speeding up. The angle at which a collision takes place dictates whether the faster object is impeded or accelerated by slower moving objects. The ratio of impediment versus acceleration substantially favours impediment. A colder slower moving atom will never catch a faster one when travelling in the same direction. The frontal collisions that occur when on the same line of travel is enough to favour overall heat loss of the warmer atoms.

Boundaries

There are two forces involved with true atoms. One is pulling the other pushing. We can refer to the pulling one as gravity. The other as proximity resistance. Both extend outwards getting weaker and weaker the further apart they are. However, the proximity resistance tails off far quicker than the gravitational pull. The gravitational pull, whilst relatively weak compared to the local resistance extends many trillions of times further out than that local resistance. The proximity resistance effect is only

relevant on the atomic scale. The induction force, gravity, is not on a linear scale with distance, but exponentially more significant the closer any true atoms get. Gravity is weak until on the verge of being at the point of greatest interaction. The force rises exponentially when very close to what you would describe as the centre. That force binds true atoms together, entangling them. The point where the gravitational force exceeds the local resistance is somewhat hazy. The boundary is not fixed.

When you press down on your table, the table resists compression. True atoms have a proximity resistance - they resist getting close to one another. That resistance has relevance when true atoms are close on the atomic scale.

As you sit in your chair reading this, with the moon on the other side of the planet, you are attracted to the Earth and the moon. The gravitational pull on you by the moon travels through the earth. This effect is quite minimal, for the moon is quite some distance from you. The effects radiating from the true atom fade fast as the distance increases. On a single plane it will be one divided by the square of the distance. The gravity drawing you to the centre of the earth is not a single force but a combination of untold true atoms pulling on you. For those of you that are unaware of how gravity draws masses together, you have mass, you are an ultra-micro planet of sorts. In space, things would be more noticeably drawn towards you. All mass has a gravitational effect on all other masses.

No true atom exists without the rest. Each individual true atom is defined by the effect it has on the others. Astronomers can spot distant planets not necessarily by seeing them directly but by seeing the effect they have on the orbit of other larger objects. They cause a wobble in the orbit of other bodies. A similar 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 the most with others. The point of greatest interaction. The true atom has no form, but presence dictated by all the other true atoms.



Are all true atoms the same? They will be moving at different relative speeds and are positioned at unique points in relation to one another. However, could there be countless types? Some could simulate a greater mass. By that we mean resist a change in velocity to a greater degree and have a differing gravitational effect. Some may have twenty percent, thirty percent, any number of percent more mass effect compared to others. Here in lies a duality. The level of mass is both on the peak of a mountain and within the bounds of a trench. On the mountain, too much mass and it tips over into the abyss, too little and it returns into

the abyss. In the trench it is held in place with some room to shift but an inherent will to maintain an average mass effect.

Whilst each true atom is the same per se, their mass effect depends on their relative velocity. The greater the velocity, the greater the mass effect. Hence, both the resistance to change in velocity and the gravitational effect relates to the relative speed of the individual true atom.

Energy

Snow, rain, sleet, ice, steam, hail. These are some of the many names we give to water. No matter whether the water molecules are bonded to one another or separate giving it a strikingly different appearance, it is still nothing other than water. We have lots of different names for energy too, despite them all being the same fundamental thing. We have potential energy, kinetic energy, chemical energy, electrical energy plus heat, light and radiation. All these categories of energy are based on the same inherent properties of the true atom. Ultimately, energy is the will to make true atoms change velocity.

A ball sitting on your desk is attracted to the moon and the Earth. More so to the Earth principally because it is closer, rather than because it contains six times the number of true atoms. That attraction places pressure on the table. As the table is higher than the surface of the earth, there is what we call potential energy stored in the ball. There is a pressure force acting on the ball willing it to change velocity. The table prevents it from doing so. Potential energy is the potential to make atoms move – change velocity.

If the ball were to move freely towards the Earth it will accelerate. The attraction encourages the true atoms to change velocity, in this case get faster in the direction towards the centre of the earth. As it accelerates it is said to obtain more and more kinetic energy. Kinetic energy is the potential to make other true atoms change velocity when they interact – collide with one another.

When the ball hits the floor, true atoms in the floor will either be moved or made to vibrate more vigorously. Heat and sound are produced. That increase in vibration level is heat. Some of the vibrations will be transferred to air molecules making those vibrate and move. The pressure applied to those air molecules is sound. Once again nothing more happens other than a change to the velocity of true atoms.

Those moving air atoms can make other true atoms change velocity as they radiate away from the disturbance. The vibrations in the floor described as heat will also provide a potential for other true atoms to change velocity - relative speed in a certain direction. We think of the types of energy as being distinct, yet all

are fundamentally the same. Energy is the force potential to make true atoms change their position or oscillate/vibrate at a greater relative rate.

Chemical potential energy is that stored in the structure of groups of atoms. The construction and destruction of structure leads to true atoms vibrating more or changing velocity. A chemical reaction may produce heat, light and movement. All of which are changes in velocity of true atoms. A chemical reaction is not particularly different to a ball stuck on a table. One might consider chemical bonds akin to springs, levers and other mechanics. Movements, potential to move, forces to incite movement. If the ball were to be made heavier, namely have a greater mass effect the ball will break through the table surface. Chemical explosions are very much like that. Ultimately, atoms changing velocity.

Entropy

Whether the energy is considered to be kinetic energy, potential energy, electrical energy, heat energy, light energy or chemical energy, they all impel other atoms to change their velocity. As each event takes place, greater overall movement is observed. Waves of motion propagate away from the interaction.

Connect a battery to a pair of rods that are immersed in water. Hydrogen and oxygen will be produced. Burn that hydrogen and use the heat to boil some water. Using the steam, you can get a turbine to turn and thereby generate electricity. That electricity can charge the battery. All good except that there are losses along the way. Only a fraction of the energy is returned to the battery no matter how clever the engineering is. One aspect of loss, unrecoverable energy, relates to entropy.

One way or another we witness a shift from a null state, no true atom inter-action, to widespread interaction, back to the null state. Whether on a local scale or universal scale, true atoms entangle and structures form. Some structures remain in place but many are shattered. We see atoms do this powering our planet. Nuclear fusion in the sun radiates heat and light towards our planet causing photosynthesis in plants that enable prosperity. At some point all the potential fusion dries up. The process by which true atoms return to their null state is the most intriguing.

Consider a photon at what you regard as the edge of the universe, departing into the darkness. The further it voyages, the less relevance it has to that which it has left behind. True atoms are defined not by themselves but by the inter-action with other true atoms. It will maintain the link to other true atoms for a period before dissipating by virtue of excess relative distance.

Returning to the thought of every true atom being gravitationally linked to one another. The forces blend into a gap free field. This plays a part in preventing further true atoms from entering the equation.

So cold the night. Fusion upon fusion with fission too. As the fusion builds too great a basic element, the will to divide into smaller chunks becomes evident. Elements have a size limitation. Stability is not found in top heavy structures.

Light is a small packet of true atoms. Light consists of true atoms on the move. Light will make other true atoms change velocity or vibrate faster during a collision. Given that light consists of true atoms it will have the properties of mass. You can therefore shine a light on something to make it move faster, or slower, or change direction. True atoms, bond and bind, loosely or strongly according to whether the structure is prone to assembling or shape shifting. The structure that the light collides with determines what happens next. The light may be absorbed – true atoms embed into the structure. The light may have its resonance frequency shifted or be reflected – a velocity change.

When true atoms fuse, they vibrate intensely often causing rapid changes in position. True atoms resist getting too close. However, once sufficiently into the fusion zone, fuse they do. The fusion zone is set by a standard relative distance from the point of greatest action. Given that this zone is as close to zero as we can imagine, the probability of two true atoms fusing is very low. The chance of a fusion increases significantly the more the true atoms are vibrating. In simple terms, heat helps. Heat being lots of vibration and relative high velocity. The fusion of true atoms leads to a massive increase in the velocity of the pair. That increase in velocity exacerbates any collision the pair make with true atoms in the way of its new path.

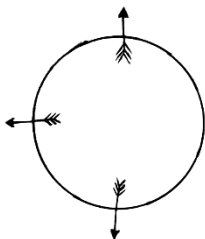
Two true atoms make a pair, three triangular, four a cross and so on. Thirteen is one of many special entities as that completes a shell around the central true atom. A fusion is not necessarily exothermic in nature at all number points. In some cases, it can be endothermic in nature. An addition that results in a completion of a shell leads to a different reaction to additions that result in incomplete structures. Splitting a twenty-six true atom structure into two thirteen true atom structures for example would be quite a different affair than spitting a twenty-five true atom structure.

In front of you lies a balloon. As the day wears on, the temperature rises, and the balloon expands. The observable universe may appear to be expanding too, not because of any change in overall temperature, but because things seem to be shifting further apart. The balloon started life as a blob of rubber.

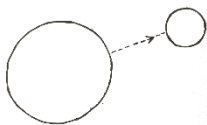
We could take a wild guess that the universe started off from a tiny blob too. We can come up with many dreadful theories like this. We can comingle some mathematics, run some equations to devise a compelling proof. If we stumble upon some issues, we can add some more conjectures and re-run the sums. The notion that the universe underwent an instantaneous expansion is quite a wild thought. Fashionable ideas are replaced soon enough.

Waves of derivation ripple through randomly bringing some true atoms out of the zero state into action. True atoms emerge with varying degrees of success. Some fail from being over 'energised', some insufficiently - not enough to attain an enduring interactive responsive presence. A percentage are set just so, not too high on that mountain and not too far over the top. Then the process of uniting and building structures begins. From there we know the rest, we can see stars being born and stars transforming making wonders never cease. One such wonder is the gun trigger mechanism in elements that spit out alpha, beta or gamma. That trigger is quite ornate. Clusters of true atoms, often from relatively far away, need hit it most accurately to trip the trigger.

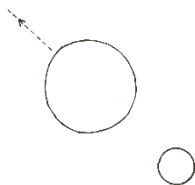
Space



These three arrows all point out from the circle. Anyone standing on Earth at these points could point upwards. However, each person's up is pointing in a rather different direction. As far as direction is concerned, up is relative to where you are. There is no consistency in regards direction with the up word. Each arrow does, however, point away from the centre of the Earth. That is consistent. There is good reason for me pointing this out. It is to give you a different way of seeing the universe and how you understand things to be.



In this illustration you are heading upwards away from the Earth down towards the moon. You will be going up and down at the same time.



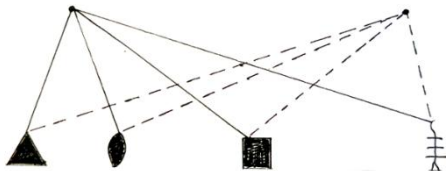
In this illustration you are going up away from the Earth and up away from the moon too. Up and down is an odd inconsistent concept. There is another way to describe changes in position. We can focus our minds on changes in distances between you and other objects. No matter where the moon is, no matter if you are going up, down, left, right, forward, backwards, rolling or yawing, namely moving

in one of the six degrees of freedom, distances apart change.

Whilst we refer to three axes, three planes, three dimensions, there is only one dimension of space. By extension having the thought of three dimensions brings about theories regarding a potential 4th dimension, or 5th dimension, and so on. If we have three dimensions, then logically we might have more. How can three dimensions be one dimension of space? When we talk about three dimensions we refer to width, length and height. Or forwards/backwards, up/down, left/right. These are axes, planes. The single dimension of space concept is supported by the problem of not being able to have a two-dimensional object, nor a single dimensional one.

If I handed you a box, how do you decide what is the height, what is the width and what is the length? You may refer to markings that someone else has made on it, but there is no definitive way to say which is which. A box doesn't have a width, height and length definitively, but three distances from the sides in each plane. We talk about drawing something in two dimensions, 2D. However, a picture is never 2D for it will have a thickness. If that thickness were to be declared as infinitely thin, it is still more than zero. A sheet of paper is a 3D object else it would be invisible. It would be non-existent in reality. Anything with an axis value of zero is a non-entity. We interchange the word dimension with planes and axes too readily. There are three axes, three planes and three dimensions of an object but you cannot have a one-dimensional object nor a two-dimensional object. Three axial-dimensions is a single dimension of space. Given that one/two dimensional worlds are non-existent, the logical hypothesis of there being a 4th or 5th dimension fades away.

A friend of yours may claim to be 12400 miles away from you given that they reside on the other side of the planet. However, they are circa 7900 miles away. It is not just your friend that is a straight-line relative distance apart, but all things are a certain relative distance away from you.



The crude sketch above helps you grasp the idea that all objects are a set relative distance apart. When you move, the distances change. Every distance changes. When you move on Earth your distance to a crater on the moon changes. Axial movements can be translated from straight-line distances alone. When you climb a set of stairs you move fifteen step lengths (diagonally) away from the bottom. That is equivalent to nine forward and twelve up. If you have a tool to measure your straight-line distances from satellites orbiting the Earth, you can calculate where you are. As you move you can determine your change in position, change in altitude, change relative to certain things on Earth.

The top of this book is for argument's sake, 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. 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. Replace up with away from the centre of the Earth and you have something consistent no matter where you are pontificating from.

We once thought that the Earth was at the centre of the universe. We later proclaimed that the Earth orbits the sun. Both notions are perfectly true. As you read this, in your spot in the universe, you are perfectly entitled to claim that you sit at the centre of it all. Everything is moving in relation to you, relative to you, changing relative distances from you.

The measure of the relative speed of light differs according to the medium it is passing through. The speed can be affected when surrounded by mass. Light shone through a tunnel beneath the earth will differ in relative speed from light shone above ground.

Magnetism and radiating forces are brought about by the arrangement of true atoms. These arrangements enable tunnelling effects and internal vibrations to manifest themselves.

Intangible

Many of us work to earn some money. Money being something entirely imaginary. Then go out to meet someone in the hope that they fall in love with them. Love is also an imaginary concept. Lust is also imaginary but sure fires you up to have sex. You get paid via a change in a financial register. Possibly by a shift in atoms of some sort, somewhere. The love is a change in chemistry in your physiological being. And lust stemmed from the arrangement of the atoms in your genes. The arrangement and the position of atoms is all it is. We live in a world of intangibles and our body makes things seem most real.

One could, by whatever means, journey down a road in a simulated manner. The visual effects, the auditory effects and even the gravitation forces due to acceleration can be simulated, so much so that one finds it hard to determine whether the experience is real or not. A rigorous definition of what is real and what is not is hard to come by. A photograph is a real object but could depict something that is not real. The information contained in the photograph may be unreal, inaccurate or misleading. The photograph could have been edited, doctored, adjusted, changing the initial information that went through the camera lens. The photograph is made from atoms. The photograph is a real object portraying something that may or may not be truthful. The truth, the realness of something stems from belief. Humans interpret information presented to them and decide what is real or not. A simulation can feel real. It can, feel most like a real event, but a simulation is also a real thing in its own right – a simulation experience.

That which stimulates you, thereby simulating the events will have true atoms moving in marvellous ways to produce the experience. Nevertheless, the simulator represents movements in an abstract domain. When driving down what most would consider to be an actual road, your entire body gets carried inside the vehicle along the route. You change position in a vastly different manner to your movements in a simulator. The atoms in your body do not move down a street in a simulation despite what it may feel like. This is obvious and should not need writing about yet highlights problems with the human belief system. What you believe is down to your interpretation. Observers may concur with your belief and help you determine what was real.

I can pay someone with a bar of gold, handing them a slab of atoms. Alternatively, I can credit their account. As I credit their account, atoms move in the ledger. Hence, unreal actions are a

blend of real actions and unreal representations. Atoms moved on the ledger which changed what is represented, in this case shifting atoms physically also changes the amount someone owes. Our language is not ideally suited to conveying the concept of true atoms. Or I am not a master at using the tool of language. The more I write, the more contrary and difficult it becomes to explain what is simple, for me at least, to visualise.

One thing to bear in mind with simulations in the software driven sense is that they can be reset to start states. Then re-run. Under no circumstances whatsoever can true atoms be returned to their former relative positions with all other true atoms also set as they were before they moved. That applies to any attempt on a small local scale. True atoms are bound up with entropy, without which relative movement would not happen.

True atomical; the nature of true atoms. True atoms react, respond and guide other true atoms. Information is knowledge, data, values, experience – something interpretable with human meaning. If we knew the relative position and velocity of a true atom that would be a piece of information. That is an item of data. A true atom is an entity of data in itself – a single entity residing at a relative distance away from all other true atoms.

You are welcome to think of the universe as a giant simulation so long as you appreciate the incomparable difference between a software simulation and the true atom disposition. Each true atom is linked, albeit to a lesser degree the further they are apart from one another. Each true atom resides at a relative distance apart. There is nothing externally controlling them. They interact with one another. True atoms can interfere with the movement of other true atoms. It is humans that place significance on their position and movement. A computer is built from true atoms and any simulation held within bears no resemblance whatsoever to the simulation effect in the universe. A computer simulation is representational whereas true atoms interact where they are relative to one another. The universe incarnates the machine, most certainly not the other way around.

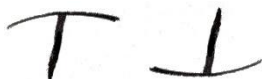
Those that believe that some spiritual entity could guide true atoms independently, individually, are sorely deluded. What you use to guide would interfere with unreal amounts of true atoms that you want to leave alone. If the guiding force has no effect on the way to the target atom, it won't be able to affect any atom.

Rounding errors deny the possibility of absolute predictability. As one vibrating true atom sets out on a path towards another vibrating true atom, one cannot determine the resultant path of either in every instance after they interact. There is a probability of something predictable happening in regards cause and effect.

True atoms take on the behaviour of mass, an emulation of mass. Whilst there is a point of greatest action associated with true atoms, their spread of action would be somewhat flexible. They have the propensity to interfere in a wave motion whilst also putting up total resistance too if the alignment of the closing trajectory is most centred. When true atoms pass by one another, some buffeting will occur. The level increases most dramatically when exceptionally close. Given that the effect is largely one divided by the radius squared on a single plane, that closeness is most relevant. The buffeting/interference is not limited to a single plane, however. A segment of the spherical zone of action is in play. Imagine two skinned oranges passing by each other. If close, then one segment on each orange becomes 'mashed'. A little closer and three on each are entangled temporarily. Closer still and five on each. Unlike oranges, true atoms have segments that contort and compress – segments of interaction. For clarity, each segment is blended and with no divisions. Oranges ought only help you picture the effect.

True atoms have a set behaviour. They form specific structures which are limited in variety at the basic level. The mass effect is set. The level of interaction between them is set. And set at just the right amount, not too much, not too little. It is incredibly finely balanced. It has an inherent genius. It is though, self-balancing. If the effects were not just so, the true atoms would not bind and stay bonded, nor form structures that form basic particles, that form neutrons, protons and electrons that form elements, that form chemical compounds and ultimately biology. The marvel of biology is derived from the marvel of chemistry which relies upon wonderful formations of true atoms. Those arrangements give rise to the electron shells. Those structures dictate that two electrons complete the first inner shell and eight in the next. This is all truly magnificent but nothing to marvel at when you see that it is simple numbers in play. Not complex mathematics. Not complex design but simple numbers, simple fitting together of singular informational atoms.

That level of mass effect is the only level it can be. One might equate the balance akin to an easily toppled pin on its point. However, the balance is self-regulating, self-righting pin facing north.



One need not concern oneself with many connected semi-constant constants, but one interaction value between the true

atoms. The mass and gravitational effect are not distinct but mirror each other albeit to a vastly different degree. All the different forces that we measure and utilise stem from the same source flexi-constant held within the true atom. If you get one value right, all else falls nicely into place. Whilst genius emerges from that one value; the one true atom construct, the rest needs no cleverness whatsoever. Put a snowflake under a microscope and see the patterns. They are built from one compound. One compound, one principle and a bounty of uniqueness and similarity at the basic level – identical intra hydrogen-oxygen attraction.

The magic of structure is there for you to feel. To see. To toy with. A change in structure causes a change in appearance and a change in the way it reacts. A change in structure changes the combustibility, the way it reflects light and so on. Carbon atoms 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 remarkably different, in the case of diamond, something very hard and solid. Toxic gas can be transformed into chocolate by adjusting the structure of the neutrons, protons and electrons. Same neutrons, same protons, same electrons just arranged differently. You can set fire to a diamond and make a gas that is rather good at putting out fires.

Carbon can be black and sooty or crystal clear for a very simple reason. Imagine a pile of scaffolding sticks in a messy pile versus scaffolding sticks neatly assembled, uniformly held together, lattice work. Climb aboard the messy pile and you come to grief as sticks scatter, twist and mesh. Climb aboard a scaffolded structure and it will provide a decent walkway. Thrown at the right angle, a ball will pass unhindered through the scaffold. Whereas a ball will either bounce awkwardly or get stuck within gaps of your messy pile. Light encounters this same effect. Hence, a black appearance or a clear transparent effect. Move one stick from the pile at ease but move one within a scaffold structure and the whole structure moves with it. Structure makes all the difference in every chemical, biological, physical and psychological instance.

Trying to define simple standard units such as the metre, ampere, temperature etc is quite challenging. It appears 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. Each are interdependent, each affect one another, each contain one another. A parallel to this is



there to be seen on an old-fashioned steam engine. It has a spinning regulator/governor. As the engine presses to run faster, the arms of the regulator move outwards closing off the steam pressure and vice versa.

You can apply a force to an object to increase its relative speed. The force causes acceleration. Each time you apply the force it accelerates some more, more but not quite as much. There comes a point where the force no longer has much effect. As the velocity increases, 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, the average taken as the constant speed of light. Any time it fractionally exceeds the boundary it is brought back into line quickly by its inherent mass limiter.

Pathways



When we push one end of a stick, we see the other end appear to move at the same time. However, there is a slight delay, imperceptible in a broom handle but there, nevertheless. A wave of crumpling and re-expanding, all along its length takes place. The path that the wave takes is somewhat longer than the stick itself. It is zig-zagging. 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 mosquito 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. Paths are often neither straight nor direct.

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. They are difficult to answer, though some adults with childish humour counter these questions with aplomb. The ignorance paradox is a knowing, not knowing conundrum. If the universe had come into existence in the way we see it today, not once but multiple times, we have no evidence, nor knowledge of the previous incarnations. These universes would have come and gone entirely. The information interacted then stopped interacting. With no memory, no crossover between incarnations, each incarnation therefore never occurs. You exist, then you don't. The history of each incarnation is not recorded. Each incarnation appears and fades leaving no trace. I hope that helps you reframe the notion of

before and after. There is no before this incarnation nor anything after from our standpoint now. A human may like to enumerate each incarnation giving this one number 269. However, each incarnation is the first incarnation as there is no deposition made each time. There is no trace of previous incarnations and this incarnation will leave no trace behind. This incarnation is the testament to that. The evidence for everything revealed here is all around you. You can study structures and their formation in your own time to change a hypothesis via belief to a firm understanding.

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. Time remember is an abstract human concept. True atoms materialise and move, at different relative velocities. When the conditions are right, enough in close vicinity they change state once again. Spawned from nought. Returned there periodically – though each period is not counted for each period wipes the history of all that went on.

Might you return in a future universe and make the same mistakes? Humankind is quite likely to re-emerge. It is reasonable to suggest that someone with the same genes as you will be born too. The chance of the environment you grow up in being the same is rather slim. One conversation in an unbelievably chaotic world can lead you down a different path. A teacher may or may not convince you of something. You may or may not have a similar accident, or incident. Your preferences will of course guide you in similar ways, however, the probability of living fundamentally the same life is hyper-unlikely. No matter how rewarding you find your life to be, no matter how influential, how exciting and prosperous, you will die leaving no permanent trace and have no memory of the disappointments. A life is true atoms changing relative positions until they respawn their interaction with one another.

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. I say that as many have pointed out that an eye is a lens at heart. An eye will always be like the eyes we see here as light bends and focuses with lenses. Some things work well, others don't. Only things that work well linger.

The electronics revolution started with the humble battery. With the means to produce electricity people then sought to turn the flow on and off with valves then transistors. Complex computers soon followed. The first part of the journey, building a pile of metals soaked in acid was slow compared with the latter. The early stages of animal evolution were slow too.

With lots of simple switches joined in unison, working in harmony we get a powerful computer. The possibilities increase tremendously with a small increase in the number of switches. With 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. Each extra switch doubles the permutations. From two states with one switch to over a million with twenty. 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. Lots of them.

Whether it is a computer or animal species, the building blocks need to be in place and working reliably first. Evolution is taking those basic building blocks and steadily adding more. 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

The structures formed from true atoms gives us the nature of the elements. Single oxygen atoms are attracted to other singles. They play a rapid dating game. Oxygen is not to be found for long as a single widow. O_2 fills the air, not single O. The same goes for Nitrogen. Many elements are attracted to other elements. Conversely there will be many instances where a repulsion is seen. Compounds form. This propensity to bind and make complex structures is based on attraction and repulsion in certain quarters. Some structures will be stable, others less so. The arrangement is key. Unstable structures will inevitably fall apart. Stable ones will linger. If certain chemicals get into contact with each other, reactions will occur. Bigger and more intricate compounds form. Your body is here today because atoms have a certain degree of attraction or repulsion between them. The simple facets of atoms enable sophistication.

Place some large beans and some smaller beans in a glass container. Mix them up. Shake the container side to side. The larger beans shift to the top leaving all the smaller ones at the bottom. Random shaking produces order. This ought to help you understand the will to form. Chaos makes order. Every shake moves the beans nearer to a neat order. A similar process takes place with basic compounds forming much more complex ones.

The attraction of atoms towards one another is the stepping stone on the path of structure formation. There is a will to form. An automatic process of simplicity heading to complex. Gravity, mass effect, then bonding, then building. Unstable to more stable. Bunching, then splitting then recombining to make ever more elaborate forms. Crystals, lattices, networks, catalyst systems. Chemical fuels, chemical puddles, chemical production. This taking place on a planet that rotates helps. That gives us a heating, then cooling. Change.

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 goes into 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.

One might sit in one's chair and bemoan the folly of reductionism - things reduced to their basic form. Every word in this book is made up of letters. There are essentially twenty-six letters in the language used to write this text. Knowing that all words are made of these basic building blocks is not remotely useful. To get to the point quickly, consider the difference between a word made from a string of letters and a chemical formula. We had many different spellings for words until they were standardised. I can though, spell a word in a non-standard way, and it will most likely infer the same thing. Joly, Jolly, Jollie, jollie. In context, that was jolly good. Do that misspelling with a chemical formula and you won't need me to explain the fundamental difference. One letter difference in a chemical formula can transform a medicine into a poison. Those that dismiss an argument on the basis that reductionism can be faulty, miss the point being made. Explaining that a snowflake forms because it is made of atoms, which are made of neutrons, protons and electrons, is inadequate. Snowflakes form when specific atoms combine then form bonds between each compound. We know reductionism has a place and we know it has limits. We also know it is the key to getting to grips with how things work.

Accidental progress

Many discoveries were brought about by chance and from unintended results seen during research. Serendipity. Scientists found something unexpected happening 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. Evolution is punishing, most evolutionary steps lead nowhere. 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 compared with 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 the level of 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 we do, to get attention - with their privates glowing bright red, legs wide open, laying partially back between the branches of the tree. There are quite a few things that put them on par with us. Namely, their use of sex to gain power and favour, scolding their infants plus teaching children the tricks of many trades. They understand one another quite well but have not been seen writing about it. They may never arrange prose as neatly as you and I, but other animals do communicate admirably.

Animals evolve when they have sufficient opportunity, space and a level of peace. 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 there? 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 generations, countless generations before distancing themselves as top primate. With new tools, more knowledge, progress has been swift but 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 resting 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. 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 will be in decline. Would contact with other communicating life forms 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

What has evolution brought us? The bourgeois perhaps? The idea of there being us and the bourgeois is largely fictitious. Nevertheless, all fiction contains a tiny bit of truth.

Some of the bourgeois start life on an even keel, with rich parents. However, this is not a prerequisite for living the bourgeois premium life. Given that they are formed in an attractive outer suit, they will be showered with a great deal more cash for less input than the rest of us. Your job, your function, your duty, is to serve the bourgeois. Sometimes you will be given a bowl of rice in return for showing up. A party is not a party unless there are lots there. Your duty is to make up the numbers and assist in building the atmosphere. You may be shmoozed and lightly thanked for clearing the dishes, growing the crops, delivering the goods. You will earn a little, pay some tax, spend a little to fool your reward system. The bourgeois need a functioning economy to revel in their senses.

The bourgeois have the most satisfying, gratifying, enjoyable time. They tend to elicit sympathy and attention via tales of high drama. They will arrive late in the belief that you will wait expectantly for their arrival – nothing important can start until they are in the room. People side towards them. It is poor form to have it the other way around.

You may believe that your invention, your creation, your empire is going to set you apart. It won't. Your invention will be used by the bourgeois. Your creation will be used by the bourgeois. Your empire provides a service for the benefit of the bourgeois.

You need the body shape, body beautiful, body respect. If you have enough of that you may qualify to begin using people, fooling people and false promising. You learn to be a fluffy type on the surface, full of praise and flippant charm. You learn to stick the knife in and twist hard, metaphorically speaking. Your insults go for the jugular. These are snide insults using cleverly crafted arguments. The bourgeois give a little with the one hand and take vast amounts away with the other. They will keep you in your place via popularity competitions. You have little chance of fighting back. They enlist armies against you.

Animal Machine

Like it or not, we are animals. Like it or not, we are fancy self-repairing machines. 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. As for the ability to plan, 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.

You may have tried meditation. You may have looked at ideas in relation to self-improvement. You might have wished for spiritual enlightenment. These things are wonderful. However, maybe it is time to look at something vastly different. Attention monitoring - the pinnacle of all curiosities relating to our inner workings. You can do it by yourself on your self. It takes a little grit yet is nothing more than paying attention to your attention.

We can only pay attention to one thing at a time. When multi-tasking we focus on one thing whilst using autonomy on the rest. We may switch our attention quickly between many things, but we can never pay attention to two things simultaneously. We switch attention to make adjustments. Our attention may receive an interrupt if something is going awry, maybe an item is slipping from our grip, or we hear a sound etc. Our attention flicks from one thing to another.

One can see the effects of attention switching when observing a group of people out hiking. When they encounter a gate or have steps to climb the talking will stop. It will stop whilst they negotiate the obstacle. Our attention switches from focusing on the conversation to dealing with the obstacle. Encountering the obstacle invokes an interrupt signal which is sent to grab hold of the attention. The hikers will deal with the obstacle then carry on talking afterwards. We can drive and chat, but we pause speaking when something in the road diverts us. Our sub-conscious acts for us at times. We perform tasks without focusing on them, that is once our attention system sets them in motion. The attention activates a process then our autonomy takes over. Areas of our minds spot potential problems and send interrupt signals.

When we are learning to drive a vehicle, we focus on this new learning activity. We pay attention to the handling of the vehicle. As we gain experience 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 very little attention as we are so familiar with the journey. Autonomy in action.

Our attention moves from one thing to another, constantly throughout the day. The attention can dwell for twenty seconds or longer. However, the dwell time is often fleeting, very brief. The piece of time the attention stays fixed on something is what we call a moment. The attention system 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.

Attention monitoring is one of the most insightful experiments you can do by yourself. It will give you a deep understand of the human machine. All one need do is pay close attention to your attention. Your inner mechanical workings will be revealed through the process 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. Observe the mechanical aspects of eating, drinking and sexual moments. Nothing will be quite the same again. It is revealing and insightful, but not life enhancing. Most definitely not life enhancing.

All through the day you can probe the countless moments. Probe the physicality of your actions. You need to be fully aware of your attention whatever you are doing. Aware too when you are relaxing. It is hard to describe and even harder to get under the skin of it straightway. This is not remotely akin to mediation. This is far removed from deep trances. What is your attention focusing on right now? That needs to be the question you keep asking yourself. Perpetually. Open a window into the soul. Get into the habit of noticing what the attention is dealing with. Over time, you become positively aware of each thing that you are focused on. You will 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.

The aim of the self-experiment is to scrutinise all the interruptions that you encounter. All day, every day. You will notice the messages from your bladder informing you of the need to go to the toilet. Think about your thought paths as you are about to climb some stairs. You may make a brief judgement before you climb them. Pay close attention to what your attention switches

to if you bump into someone coming the other way. Study yourself recalculating a new path. Life maybe a series of problems but it is also a sequence of interrupts.

When you blink, the vision system in your mind shuts off. It shuts off in sync with the blink making it disappear from your consciousness. You don't see black flashes every few seconds in day-to-day life. 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. They scan left, right, up, down, across. The scan is rapid. The same scan viewed through a video camera creates a horrid fast paced jumping about. We do not witness this jumping about with our eyes. This is not how we experience life. Our visual scan and each change of attention is merged and smoothed over.

The attention is the core of the being. It is the gateway to all areas of the mind. The attention manufactures the sensation of being conscious. The process by which the attention flits between each function 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. To understand consciousness, complete the self-experiment in attention watching. The smooth flow, the gentle transition between each attention switch and the way the mind blends each moment hiding what would be a horrid reality. The experiment enables you to grasp the essence of consciousness.

Interrupts attempt to grab our attention. We can ignore them if we choose and continue with what we are focusing on. 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.

Many parts of the human machine begin to decline as we age. The machine begins to struggle tuning into one person amongst all the background noise. When in peak condition it can decipher fragmented speech quite well. It can calculate the most probable bits that it missed and string it all together into something coherent. Various mind modules can buffer information. Buffering sound enables us to replay what we heard. Useful but error prone. We can replay the sounds stored in the buffer a few

times to try work out what we heard or what we think we heard. It is here that we may invent a piece and put it into the stream. We invent something that fits. An assumption, a presumption, a guess.

These buffers have storage limits. For audio it typically equates to about two seconds worth of audio. When making a mental note of a long number, it is not the number of digits spoken to you that counts as much as the number of digits spoken in that storage time frame. You can capture more when things are said quickly.

There is a lot going on inside us, night and day. Our minds have a lot to contend with - just to maintain the health of the body. Regulating, controlling, monitoring. Signals are sent back and forth endlessly. We think of ourselves as a single entity, a person, an individual but we are in fact a bundle of co-operating, symbiotic units. The heart operates independently from the head using its own neurons set within it. It is a subtle but significant detail; 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 with its own thinking capability. The mind talks to each participant in this conglomeration of parts. It will talk and respond to phantom limbs too as much of the messaging system is still in situ despite the arm/leg being absent.

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. Your collection of parts hosts a few kilograms of bacteria with their own cooperative agenda. It is not only you that gets hungry. Your gut and your skin have unpaid workers helping your stay in good shape. Wash them off, wash them out at your peril. Wash gently and sporadically. Eat with care and attention.

There is a lot we can do without being able to describe how we do it. We 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. The reason we struggle to describe how we do things is often because we forgot that we pre-programmed our actions. We planned, we programmed and then executed the plan. We made a few adjustments to improve then repeated until we are happier with our performance. Then we stop thinking about how we got to where we are with our skill set.

An area of the mind can be set a task to do. When it is complete it will let us know by sending an interrupt to our attention. We may be working on a problem. We 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. A puncture in your tyre sets you off on a mission to spot a repair shop. Beforehand these repair shops were barely noticed. Now and for a good while after they seem to stand out wherever you go. The task is not erased.

Place a treat in someone's bedroom. Put it somewhere where it can be seen but not too obvious. It can be days rather than hours before they notice it. Your vision system may have the optics of a camera but works in an entirely different manner. The system builds a picture, partly by inventing things to speed up the processing. It assumes using prior experience. It takes something from memory and places it in the scene. When one walks into a room, we do not process each and every object. That would take a very long time. Instead, we identify the important things. Our memory of what we think we saw is often far removed from the information that went through our eyes.

Picture the scene, you walk into a busy restaurant and what do you see. What grabs your attention? You spot those that you know and some of the ones that you do not. Familiar faces stand out. Unfamiliar attractive ones stand out too, ones that you find attractive. Which ones do you remember being there? Old people grey out, hide in plain sight as the visual 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.

Your mind ignores a lot, it cuts corners, approximates things and allows 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. 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.

One of the highlights of your self-experiment with attention watching will be pain and sensory alarms that quickly grab your attention. Pay attention to how your attention is deviated from the present task by any unusual touch, itch or bite. Sounds above ambient levels and unexpected tastes will come to the fore along with reminder signals. We set up inbuilt reminder calls for

something we had planned to do. You need to explore each interrupt. There are lots of them throughout the day.

Pain thresholds vary from person to person with some being able to tolerate a lot more than others. Some aspects of pain can be enjoyable. Pain is change after all. Change feeds the reward system. What some people take great pleasure in, others find uncomfortable. Many are just indifferent towards pain.

Some of you may wish for more details regarding attention watching, but no further explanation is needed. Keep focusing on your attention during 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 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.

To give you an idea of the process, start by watching your blinking. You will notice the black flash on every blink. Within a minute or two you will forget that you forgot to watch the blinking. That is ok in regards the blinking but not ok in regards overviewing your attention. You need to maintain the awareness of what the attention is dealing with. A habit will form. You are set to get a first-hand insight into the mechanics of the animal machine. When you are finished, when weeks of this is kept up you will grasp how human consciousness works.

There are many mind challenges available for you to try. Perhaps swap the knife and fork from left to right hand, or vice versa, for a meal or two. When watching a film or sporting event, keep your focus on one person, the referee, a player or actor. Ignore the rest. Just watch that one person where possible for a while.

Lie on your back. Close your eyes. Plug your ears. Get someone to touch you at random. Be titillated or sensually soothed. Do not move, flinch or react. Let the mind alone surveil the sensory action. Enter the world of the animal machine.

Special keys

Our moments can be manipulated by special keys. The keys affect the duration of our moments, and the experience contained with them. 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. That is with eyes closed or open. Sounds can be replayed. Some keys can interfere with the usual way we manage our 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 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.

The ubiquitous key found in wine and whiskey can send your head into quite a spin, particularly when taken to a degree of excess. Many will fight the spin. That wastes the money spent on the joy ride. Relax, relax somewhere comfortable. Let all your limbs flop. The spin will increase substantially. Faster and faster. Disappointingly it will tail off sooner than one may hope. Savour that moment as the price you pay is less in the cost of the liquor but the obscene hangover that sets in and lingers for far too long.

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 good outweighs the bad, despite the spiteful vein inside us all that lashes out occasionally. Retaliation is rewarding. As is making peace 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 battle against those that wish to thwart us and 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 or two remain - 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. We can be proud of the service we give. Content, particularly when paid for our undertaking. 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. Many 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 data. 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 new development. If it is not deterioration, then a building has to avoid fire, floods and earthquakes. 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 though.

Temperature dictates. 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

A downbeat attitude gets us nowhere. However, 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. The houses we helped build provide places for people to live. The food we produce gives nourishment and the games we craft provide entertainment. We are always learning despite ignoring warnings from history. We make medical advancements. New drugs and better technology become available even if it is just new techniques and methods of doing things quicker and more cheaply. Nevertheless, the bulk of the population go into work and do their bit. They 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 taxis 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. Those that think about greater productivity end up with just a minor improvement. Those that push for progress usually achieve nothing more than a minor improvement from the slight tweaks they make. We make changes that introduce new issues. A change can be just that, a change and not much more. Hence this book started from the very thought of why we bother. It will be read by a tiny number of people and lost in the mass of all the other works, camouflaged by the array of more enticing fashionable works.

We can revel in a long lie in, staying in bed until early afternoon. We might enjoy idling away a day or two. However, most tire of this when days of doing little extends to weeks and months. Some of us begin collecting, hoarding, cataloguing. Others extend their skill set. If nothing else, 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 stored 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 outside our solar system. Not in our current form anyway. 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 feeble outside of it.

We live in a relatively thin atmosphere. We 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. A large explosive could alter its trajectory so long as it is spotted early enough. However, the odds of success with a fragmented parcel of rocks is slim. 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 difference whatsoever. 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 matter. It would be a pity for us. We no longer would have this place to live. We are the only ones that think it matters. All that knowledge, all those talents would be lost. All 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.

So, tell me this. If I can confidently say that nothing matters, why does it seem that things do indeed matter? Put the book down and write down the answer. Or take a sip, be spoon fed once again. It matters because you have time left. You have further to go. You are still alive. What happens next, what has happened lately and what might happen soon matters. The more you learn the more you can apply it. The more quality friends you have the more chance of spending quality time together. The better your reputation, the better you are received. Any slander fired in your direction matters as that can dictate what you can and can't do. Your good name matters until you get too decrepit to care. Your finances matter as that dictates the comfort and options available to you going forward into the future. All aspects of your life matter if they are to be of help to you in the coming years. The amount of reward set to be released in your head is dependant on your situation now and prospective situation in the future. Your legacy will fade to next to nothing. However, you want to revel in the pride in your achievements before you go. Or feel that warm glow periodically as you daydream about your family thinking fondly of you. That daydreaming takes place before you die. Evidently it stops afterwards.

You can shrug of what happened yesterday, ignore it or put it down to experience. It doesn't matter. However, what happened yesterday, what happened an hour ago can affect what is set to happen in the days, months, years that you have left alive.

We care about what people think and rightly so. We care about what we have achieved and rightly so. 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. Not to us anyway. To others maybe. It feels good to think about what will be of us when we are gone. We feel it matters as we feel it physically now. On a universe level our lives are tokenistic. They represent something. Our lives have a value. An imaginary value no different to other imaginary concepts, money, love, time.

You could write a drama screenplay about our family said she with that intense self-facing gawp. The twists, the turns the thought-provoking nuances are all there. However, not most families, but all families will be packed full of drama. There will be many a sexual assault witnessed or hidden. At least one of the family members will be subject to a rape or pressured into sex. A fool assumes that applies only to the female members of your

family unit. There will be jealousy, rage, and affairs. There will be betrayal and scheming. Bulling and trauma aplenty. Childhood damage. Childhood scarring. Children planned and unplanned. Cukolding. Bizarre coincidences are rightly normal and expected. Misery and moments of utter joy. Your family is nothing special. Nothing out of the ordinary. And your part matters to you the most. All families will have some excitement, somewhere at some point.

If you think you excel at existence by steering away from the linear life, look around and take off your prejudicial scorn suit. Whilst a typical linear life entails schooling, the first love, the first thrust of intimacy, the first infatuation, the first fling. That is followed by the first step in your 'career'. Then marriage or marriage of sorts. Then a child or not. Then some more hard work. Then doubts and redirection, then retirement, then death. That path. That one way of copying the rest can be sidestepped. Maybe you are a grifter, a joker, an opportunist that lives in a paper thin-walled mobile home in a shit corner of the globe. You have never escaped nor deviated from the linear life. Not really. You are a pretender and an inverted snob. Disagree at your leisure but accept that you are just another skeleton with skin wrapped around it trying to be relevant.

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 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. The problem 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. Clothes are more comfortable now some may proclaim. That is quite possible. Is it as long lasting, does it have the same character, does it come at great expense to those that make it, those that deal with it once you have had enough of it.

In the past good quality housing, access to information, clean running water and the means to travel were an aspiration. Now they we take a lot of these things 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 to what goes on outside of their locality. Besides there is a limit to what we can do or what we 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 a myriad of distractions where we can't even use the toilet 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 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.

Believe me when I say that one big achievement you can be pleased about 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 nothing much is definitive. Nothing we do is always correct and just. There are multiple ways of tackling problems. None of which are perfect. We need to determine what to do in each scenario taking more into account that we can accommodate. 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. So sad, so unsteady on your feet unable to perform basic things. 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. After that, 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. You are what you can do. It is difficult to pinpoint when the zenith of your life is, the point 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. Unless today is the day you decide to improve your fitness, eat better, adjust risks and push the day of

doom further away. Some may goad you to plant a garden or convince you that you ought to learn how to make fancy bread. I wanted to give something back to the earth upon which I came so I bought many segments of land which I left alone. Nature has managed just fine for hundreds of thousands of years. 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. Will that be forever though. I doubt it. Some cretin will deem it land to be forcefully acquired and used for something quite objectionable. Other rancid parasitic cockroaches will dump toxic crud on it to earn a miserable sum.

There is nothing mankind has done, not a single thing that has improved the planet's overall ecosystem. We have been nothing but detrimental and destructive to the natural world. We have made no improvements to anything except enhancing our own way of life. Your dwelling occupies land that another cannot now subsume. The ecosystem will not pity your demise. The ecosystem will be thankful for it. There will be more to go around. This is not a call to action, but a statement of truth. It will get far worse until breaking point.

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 re-read 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. Zookeepers know they themselves are not superior. They aren't looking down their nose at others. They are not laughing at the rest. 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, our struggle is largely for the benefit of the bourgeois headed by the king master ant.

The dabblers explore quite a lot. They feel semi-satisfied that on aggregate they have lived a virtuous life. They 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 also enjoyable looking forward to things in the future. We can have balance. An equitable portion of all three. Now, then, soon - for all are good.

It is all about degrees, degrees of merit. A dog 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. It 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. So close but not close enough.

In a near silent floosh it was gobbled by a crafty fish lying 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. Slow in mind, fast in unusual body movements with a gurning grin and docile manner. The fruitlessness of their life 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. She saunters along to open up and get things ready once again. She knows 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 compared to 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 in play 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.

Some of the errors can be seen as mistakes. The experience aided interactions with others in the years ahead. A therapist would be of little use to me, I knew what would have therapeutic value. I was right. To obtain that therapy I would need to avoid making the same mistakes with ripe assistants. The other errors will always be viewed as regrets from where I now sit. I no longer have what I need to explore certain things. I can't test and evaluate certain propositions. Some small sections can't be included as I didn't get the chance to ratify them. So much potential lost. It is not a pity, others will write them for me. Anything worth writing will get written by someone at some point.

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. She 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.

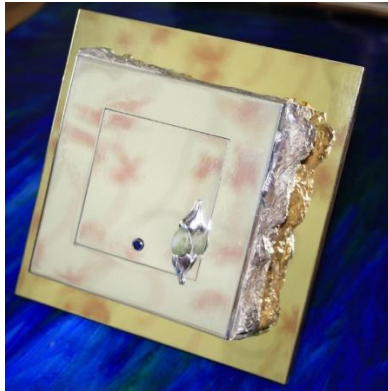
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Each part is taken out of their wrappers, slowly, one by one. All the bits needed are laid out in front of you. Some were difficult to obtain, some cost more than you would have liked, but everything is ready for you to start putting them together. 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.

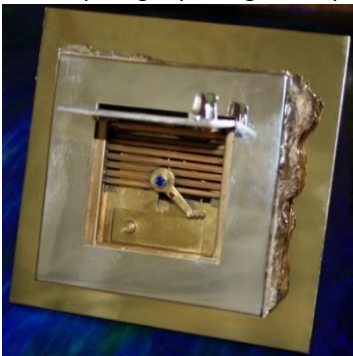
Illustrations



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.

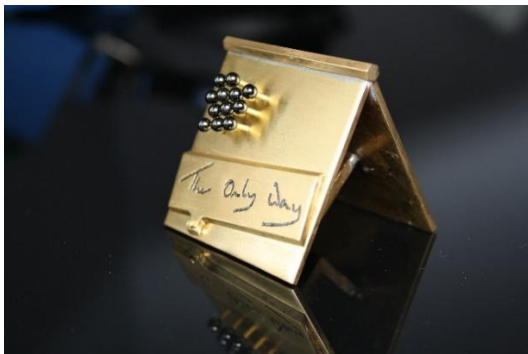
I attempted to mill a logo on a platinum piece using a very fine bit (0.2mm). It worked in principle but each time the mill snapped it was hard to set it back off again from the same place. The assay office kindly laser engraved it instead for a reasonable token sum. Pragmatic decisions win us over. 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.