# Journal of Modern Wisdom

FOR PUBLIC THINKERS AND THE THINKING PUBLIC

*Volume 1*

## Featured Artist

Brazilian artist Thais Beltrame was born in 1976. When she was little, she despised coloured pencils and used to compulsively scribble on her mother's books with a ball pen, creating endless narratives with simple lines. Today the results of such acts are universal existential issues represented in black and white, which recreate the memories of our childhood in all its darkness, sadness, discovery and glow.

Thais makes subtle and meticulous use of brush and ink, creating a visual atmosphere both peculiar and melancholic. A Fine Arts graduate from Columbia College, Chicago, she lives and works in São Paulo. She has illustrated for several magazines and books, and her artwork has been exhibited in England, Brazil and the United States, as well as featured in Juxtapoz Arts and Culture magazine and a series of Brazilian magazines. Thais still creates lines compulsively, although no longer on her mother's books.

www.thaisbeltrame.com

All illustrations by Thais Beltrame, except pages 12–14 (by Jon Haste) and page 77.

*If you think your artwork would suit our journal, we'd be delighted to hear from you.*

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# Wisdom and the Good Life: a Philosophy of Conscience

*by Ben Irvine*

A participant in a psychology experiment completed a short cognitive task on a computer. He then opened the door and walked along the corridor to announce his readiness for the next part of the test. His experimenter, however, was deep in conversation with another faculty member. The participant waited patiently for the discussion to end so he could be assigned his next task. What made him be so polite?

His character probably influenced his behaviour, but another factor was involved. The whole experiment was, in fact, a ruse. The conversation between the experimenter and his colleague was designed to assess the responses of various groups of participants to different versions of a 'scrambled-sentence' cognitive task (one in which the generic idea is to rearrange sets of jumbled-up words into grammatical sentences). Included in the experiment was a particular version of the task which contained lots of words pertaining to politeness – words like 'respect', 'considerate', 'appreciate', 'patiently', 'courteous' – and the presence of these semantic 'primes' made participants more likely to behave politely in the corridor. We know this because those who completed a control version, i.e. one which didn't include the politeness primes, were quicker to interrupt the experimenter's conversation. And those who completed a version which included words pertaining explicitly to impatience – words like 'aggressively', 'rude', 'bother', 'disturb', 'intrude', 'infringe' – were even quicker.

Other studies have demonstrated a range of similar effects on participants: they do better on cognitive tasks after completing a previous one that has primed them to think about 'high-performance'; they answer more Trivial

Pursuit questions correctly after imagining being a professor rather than a hooligan; and they behave more co-operatively in 'prisoners' dilemma' games after unscrambling sets of words containing 'co-operation' primes.

A conscientious atmosphere tends to foster conscientious people. Any decent schoolteacher, sports coach, or workplace manager will tell you that. What is especially interesting is that in none of the foregoing variations did the participants have any conscious awareness of having been primed (although when such awareness was introduced as part of the experiment, the priming effect became even stronger). You could say that an indiscernible semantic milieu was able to moderate participants' behaviour; as though the usual pattern of personal learning or development, i.e. conscious, deliberate control gradually leading to automatic processes, can also occur interpersonally, i.e. an experimenter's conscious, deliberate control leading to automation in others.

You might think that sounds like manipulation. But when the motives and results are genial, I'd be more inclined to call it positive influence. Manipulation is a term I would save for the treatment most of us receive daily from the modern media. As a side-effect of fulfilling an invaluable role in relaying information, our newspapers, radios, TVs and computers are also conduits for sneakier forces: journalists and editors who look to increase their publicity through shock-tactics and sensationalism; marketers who are skilled in making their advertisements and products appeal to our evolved natures; and campaigners – religious and political – who appeal to the same intuitions to get us to do what they want and want what they do (namely their own advancement).

To invoke human nature is not to deny that it is multifaceted, nor to suggest that some behaviours are inevitable (that pesky notion of 'hard-wired'). The point is that some intuitions come easier than others. (Homer Simpson once remarked that making teenagers depressed is like shooting fish in a barrel.) Things like violence, catastrophe, status, gossip, and sugary or fatty foods would, for obvious survival reasons, have been hugely significant to our close-knit but vulnerable hunter-gatherer ancestors; and, since we share their nervous systems and tendencies, the same goes for us. To pluck one example from countless others: it's a lot easier for a newspaper to grab someone's attention (and money) by telling them a murderer is on the loose than by explaining geometry. Viewed through this lens, modern society's apparently demented obsession with danger, celebrity, communication and

junk food suddenly seems to make more sense.

Yet it's senseless. The way we live today is radically different from the way our ancestors did. Ours is a world of security and plenty, not threat and scarcity, but our advanced technologies are, ironically, still priming intuitions which belong to another era – and, in the process, are making us anxious, obese, status-obsessed and overloaded with information. Even worse, we're increasingly creating fake evolutionary fitness cues. Computer games, alcoholic beverages and 'social networking' (read: mouse clicking, screen scrolling) websites: these are mere proxies for emotions and experiences. We are disappearing up our own brain stems, as Geoffrey Miller put it.

Like the enlightenment thinkers who founded the institutions and ideologies on which our foundering democracies rest, it's time we took a long hard look at ourselves. Wise men promoted the conditions which led to the technological advancements of recent centuries; but we are now creating technologies that are undermining wisdom. Perhaps that's why so many people these days are sceptical of the notion of progress. The modern economy is like a cowboy builder, or a petulant child with a paint brush – destructive and creative at once – and we're all working harder and harder to fund such cack-handedness. It's small wonder that those economies that have advanced the furthest have also somehow commensurately regressed, with social problems, inequality and mental illness continuing to rise with GDP in the developed world. We're doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result: Einstein's definition of insanity.

Contrary to popular belief, society's immediate goal should not be to abandon the rising balloon of capitalism (say, by returning to autarky or communism), but rather to avoid setting fire to it. Then maybe we could learn to enjoy the view a little more. It's time for modern wisdom to kick harder against the pricks – the fools, fanatics and marketers who are endlessly provoking, cajoling and appealing to the neurotic aspects of our natures.

Promoting wisdom is a lot harder than shooting fish in a barrel, but intellectuals – at least, by definition – ought to be better marksmen when it comes to disseminating a message. Just as the aforementioned priming experimenters were able to moderate behaviour by creating a milieu conducive to politeness, so intellectuals could, through a deliberate effort, succeed in promoting a nicer side of human nature – and, thereby, the proverbial 'good life'.

The problem, of course, is that none of them seem to be able to agree on

what the good life is, exactly. For too long, the only consensus has concerned the importance of hauling on a rope in an unwinnable tug-of-war. On one side are the hedonists – an unlikely alliance of yuppies, druggies, shopaholics and Machiavellians – all clamouring after selfish indulgence but finding it only fleetingly, usually on the back of someone else's. On the other side are the ascetics – environmentalists, communists, hippies and fundamentalists – all looking to everyone else for a collective moral happiness that eludes them individually. There's a lot of huff and puff, and it isn't doing either side any good – let alone providing much of a spectacle for the rest of us.

Perhaps, then, you'll forgive me for proposing a more whimsical method for defining the good life: a pun. I don't mean that the pun is mightier than the sword (that would be a shameful gag, ahem). What I mean is that the light-heartedness of a pun is the perfect antidote to the either/or, tug-of-war approach to the meaning of the good life – in much the same way that an ambiguous figure (like the duck-rabbit) can be resolved only by recognising the intimacy of its opposing aspects. With this in view, the good life can be defined, simply and cosily, as one in which personal gain accrues to those who help others; such that 'good' means 'selfish *and* moral', both at once: good for me is good for you (and vice versa). This is the thread – or rope, if you will – that unifies individualism and socialism.

Of course, many practical or business people will say they knew this all along; it's just mutual gain dressed up in intellectual terms; it's just obligation or responsibility viewed through the prism of abstraction; it's just I'll-scratch-your-back-if-you-scratch-mine dressed up as non-zero-sumness. They'll add: how can a view help anyone?

The reason is: ideas matter. Without the ability to be reflective or meditative about one's priorities in life, and to cultivate a positive self-image in doing so, a person could never achieve the kind of benevolent outlook essential to promoting the good life. Whether through calm introspection, artistic expression, or enlivening activities like jogging on a winter's morning or dancing beneath the stars – what's achieved is that highly self-aware state of generosity and openness that's variously called conscientiousness, enlightenment, or wisdom. So if, as intellectuals, we are going to sprinkle society with pertinent primes – helping to generate more of that 'social capital' which has recently been identified as crucial to the wellbeing of a society – we're going to have to start by getting our self-conceptions into the right shape.

Then, of course, there's the need to combat competing negative views. There are ideologies the world over in which the colloquial decency of scratching each other's backs has been subjected to a degrading rhetorical dressing-down. Philosophy has gutted goodness of its epistemic and corporeal content; postmodernism has dragged the mindfulness and concreteness of goodness into a vortex of transient linguistic forms; and religion has redefined goodness as an aspiration for salvation from oneself and the world. These are abstractions that have vandalised rather than canonised the homely truth that goodness means individual human beings benefiting, through reputation or reciprocation, from benefiting others in a shared world. Before we corrupt any more graduates or lost souls with nonsense, we need a renewed intellectual commitment to the enlightenment truth; a 'philosophy of conscience' that's both reflective and practical, each facet feeding into the other.

Finally, and most importantly, being wise means using reflection to try to recognise and minimise the flaws, foibles and blindspots in human nature. Without wisdom, a theorist of an Adam Smithian bent might opine that any man who got rich through enterprise must, by definition, have helped others in some way (otherwise, the argument goes, no-one would have paid the rich man any money). With wisdom, we can see that this compelling view isn't entirely correct; we can separate spurious from genuine acts of economic reciprocity in the modern world – and the latter won't include the activities of tobacco or alcohol companies, arms dealers, media shock-jocks, fast food retailers, or anyone else who either primes ancestral intuitions that no longer serve our interests, or fakes evolutionary fitness cues.

Thankfully, wiser ways of thinking are already being championed. Using the critical method of science as a probe, Richard Dawkins and his proponents have increasingly been rattling nests of irresponsible ideologies, while promoting a clearer understanding of human nature. As a collaboration of free-thinking individuals with an attitude of empirical respect for the reality of the world, the scientific community is a fine exemplification of the good life, and 'humanism' is a fine name for a scientific ideology. This makes it even harder not to wince despairingly at some of the countervailing caricatures of this outlook. Far from endorsing the merciless, brutish and selfish human potentialities that Darwinism has suggested to the fevered imaginations of so many religionists, sociologists and philosophers (not to mention a certain misguided Austrian dictator), humanism strives to cultivate

that thoughtful, creative and benevolent side to human nature that makes us unique animals (for the millionth time: it's the genes that are always 'selfish', not us). The good life, as such, means acknowledging and acting on one's intellectual responsibility for learning how to substitute Darwinian co-operation for Darwinian original sin, in oneself as well as others. It's high time philosophers met humanists halfway in this effort.

In the arts, too, the good life means something. To the kind of artist who thinks art should matter, be profound or beautiful, and do the job of converting the world's tragedies into proxies for loveliness; the kind of artist who thinks that creativity matters, as a source of inspiration to the creator or the audience; the kind of artist who doesn't win the Turner Prize or make the news, and who doesn't mockingly sell the super-rich back their fripperies as fineries, or make out that art is all a matter of context. I'm no art critic, but my hunch is that what is good about the right kind of art is the same as what is good about life: making something better out of something flawed.

Yet, I hear you cry, who's to say what's good – in art as in life? Haven't we learned by now that no-one can say, and it's certainly not good to try? As seductive as it is, this kind of all-out relativism about values is surely counterintuitive. Often when people find themselves in a situation of co-operation and mutual gain, it becomes unthinkable to them that the values they are sharing by means of that relationship could be anything other than absolute. They'll agree on the necessity of certain fundamentals: such as freedom of speech; racial equality; impartial justice; political freedom; the renunciation of violence as a bargaining tool; universal suffrage; respect for the real world wherein all these values matter; even a sense that there's some vital quality which true art manifests. The act of communing – rather than hanging back and nitpicking about definitions – is, it seems, sometimes capable of generating *a priori* values (thereby, moreover, giving us a foundation of mutual respect upon which we can disagree about less important matters).

An unusual case, to say the least: an *a priori* that depends on shared attitudes and actions. As if any three lines had to actually congregate as a triangle before it could be true that a triangle's angles must add up to 180 degrees! The reason we frequently get the impression that there are communally-generated *a priori* values is likely to have something to do with the centrality of action to human existence. Perhaps action is so fundamental to us that we can't adequately view it from afar, as we can a triangle. Perhaps

each of us must *be* an action (or part of a pattern of interactions) before we can truly understand it, and so values remain epistemically inaccessible to us unless we act (or congregate) in such a way as to instantiate them. And perhaps that's why trying to defend our values philosophically so often fails. Despite what a moral philosopher will tell you, those values don't precede, but get discovered through, the good life; rendering them as fragile in the face of philosophising as they are robust in the course of acting communally. Philosophy blots out revelatory kinds of action.

And so a new kind of philosophising is needed – one that doesn't try to carry values into the critical realm of traditional philosophy, where they inevitably get watered down, but does try to carry philosophical acumen into the realm of universal values. Evolutionary psychology suggests that almost any human being can act to muster the right conduct for living a good life. If only philosophers would engage with the idea of human nature they could help us all to live more wisely.

Our choice is between two kinds of future. One in which wisdom and goodness are scarce – banished or defined out of existence by cultural leaders in universities and places of worship, or stretched to breaking point in an either/or tug of war between hedonists and collectivists. And another in which wiser values pervade and structure society, like the soundness of absolutes in a geometry textbook. Anyone who looks in the history books to find out more about what these alternatives really mean will find plenty of incentives to choose to strive for the good life.

# Pride, Pleasure, Dignity

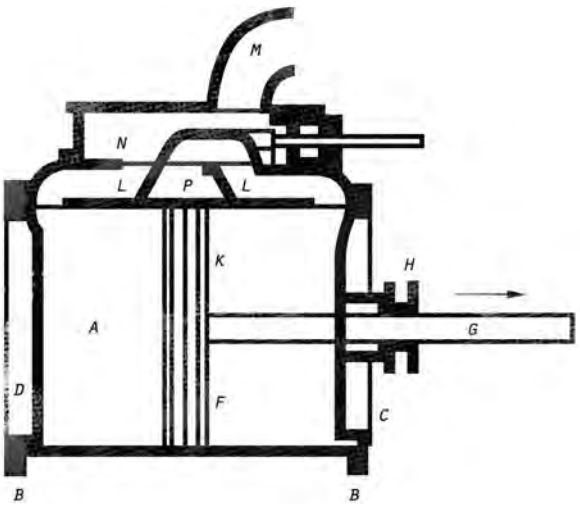
*by Stephen Bayley*

The Buddha, the Godhead, resides quite as comfortably in the circuits of a digital computer or the gears of a cycle transmission as he does at the top of a mountain, or in the petals of a flower.

ROBERT M. PIRSIG

That country is the richest which nourishes the greatest number of noble and happy human beings.

JOHN RUSKIN



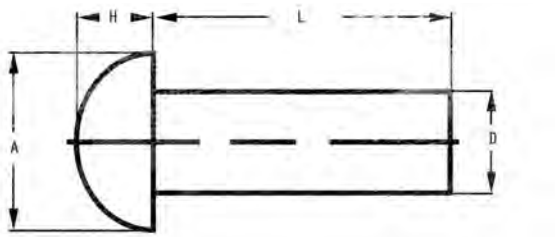

What proportion of the population has even the dimmest clue what this picture shows? Do you? The answer to the first question is "a very, very small one". The answer to the second is "probably not".

But the double-acting steam engine was what made us rich. It powered the factories, mills, ships and railways that were the industrial revolution. On farms, pumping and threshing tirelessly, it released land for useful cultivation. So the double-acting steam engine created an agricultural revolution as well.

In town and country, it worked tirelessly generating wealth. And you don't have a clue. Do you feel lazy and stupid for not recognising it?

The double-acting steam engine helped accumulate the vast national wealth that still pays for us to go on holiday. Pause for a moment to reflect that you could not explain the concept of "holiday" to a pre-industrial person. Machines made us free. Imagine. You are sitting at FL37 in your A319 on a flight to warmer climes. You are secure because the A319 has a sophisticated FEPS (Flight Envelope Protection System). But you don't know that and what do you care with a glass of New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc to hand? And the A319's wings, whose main spar is miraculously machined from solid aluminium in a factory in North Wales, have never failed. This plane is a boggling triumph of the human spirit.

But essentially, it is not the high technology that impresses. This is what gets you to Marbella:




How beautiful is that, a schematic diagram of pure, uncontaminated intelligence? What is it? A rivet, an ancient form of mechanical fastener which holds aircraft together. Hundreds of thousands of solid, friction-lock rivets made of Reynolds 2024 aluminium are keeping your arrogant and slightly tipsy arse from rapid descent to earth and thereafter into oblivion. Do you care?

You should. If you could explain to a child how a rivet works, you would be in possession of a very valuable knowledge of mechanics, the history of structures, material technology, stress, load paths and the aesthetic limitations of working in metal. But you cannot explain it because you are a modern, post-industrial Briton who has lost touch with the beautiful and important culture of *things*.

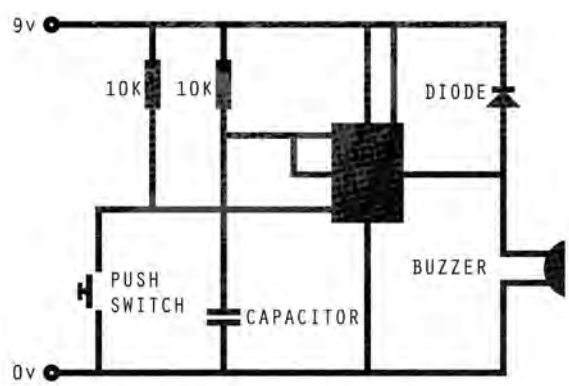
People who make things do not just have superior mechanical skills to lard-arsed incurious tourists flying towards a temporary nirvana bought on credit, they have superior cognitive skills as well. The riveting

team working on the C-47 Skytrain understands from first-hand-and-eye experience the relationship between function and form. It comes naturally to people who make things. And so too does an understanding of the quintessential relationship between effort and reward, lost in the flim-flam of post-industrial sophistry.

Riveting is a fastening process that only works in some contexts. It's good, for example, at handling shear rather than tension loads. Got that? Otherwise, you might prefer to glue, screw, bolt, nail or weld. And it's not just fastenings, there is the matter of fabrication. Do you: carve, forge, cast, injection-mould, laser-cut, robo-form or laminate? If you do not understand how all these different techniques affect the function, character and appearance of the stuff we all use, then you are, as a consumer, the equivalent of illiterate. The beautiful nose of the C-47, or, indeed, the A319, is an expression of the way it is made.

Here are three things which never get considered in public life: pride, pleasure and dignity. They were abandoned when people lost respect for the culture of things. If you know how to make something, you understand *everything* about it. You appreciate its logic, its beauty and its meaning. And its value. And you can pass on these pleasures and benefits.

Never mind an aeroplane, designing and making, say, a stacking chair is at the outer levels of human intellectual capability. Abstract reasoning, spatial awareness, advanced motor skills, a keen aesthetic sense are all required. In comparison, the attainments of a commercial lawyer or a fund manager seem crude and debased. And not very valuable. The design of stacking chairs should be essential to the national curriculum.




Look at this schematic of a PCB (Printed Circuit Board). As Robert M. Pirsig noted in his eccentric seventies classic of mystical hippy mechanics, *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, here, if you have a mind to, can be found the Buddha. Finding the Buddha is good, but there is something else as well. If you understood how to design and make this

beautiful PCB you would be… rich.

For all the benefits it brings, the PCB is evidence of the crisis in our relationship to the material world, our misalliance with the culture of things. All that is solid melts into air! All that is sacred is profaned! Marx's apocalyptic words from *The Communist Manifesto* apply not only to the social revolution of the nineteenth century which he imagined, but also to the technological revolution that is all around us. There is an argument that the most valuable commodities today are the intangible, ineffable, invisible gigabytes of RAM and data that are the double-acting steam engines of the information age. Maybe.

But in accepting the potent marvels of electronics, we have profaned the solid matter of real things. And the process of making and enjoying them too. Tools – a rivet-gun, for example – make us active and intelligent. Tools make us speculate and take risks. No-one takes the back off their lap-top: you cannot interfere with it. Early Apple computers, manufactured in the day when beardy computer geeks roamed California, were assembled with screws that required a very special tool unavailable to the un-nerdy.

The unserviceable is the unknowable: with the PCB and the products it spawns, understanding, and therefore control, passes to third parties. So, electronics tends to make us passive, dumb and uninquisitive. Searching Google is only, if we are radically honest, a very low order of intellectual inquiry. And, socially speaking: the more technological sophistication we enjoy, the greater the number of stupid jobs people have to do. In our cappuccino culture there are plenty of vacancies for baristas, very few for riveters.

But computing is just the positive, beneficial aspect of that deadly, false promise that was the post-industrial economy. This, a principal belief for fifty years, was a cruel and ruinous deception. Post-industrial means post-intelligent and pre-desolate. Post-industrial means unsatisfying occupations, meaningless targets, dumb consumption of goods fashioned by others and that generalised malaise characteristic of so many of Britain's 'clone towns'. The post-industrial economy brought us the coruscating mercenary Babel of Canary Wharf, which is all very well, but it also brought us acres of socially, morally and aesthetically catastrophic housing estates.

This is not a Luddite argument against electronics, still less is it anti industry and technology. On the contrary, it's pro industry and technology. The belief is that the world's problems will be solved by more and better technology, not less. But when you live in an economy that doesn't make

things, you live in a culture that institutionalises dumbness.

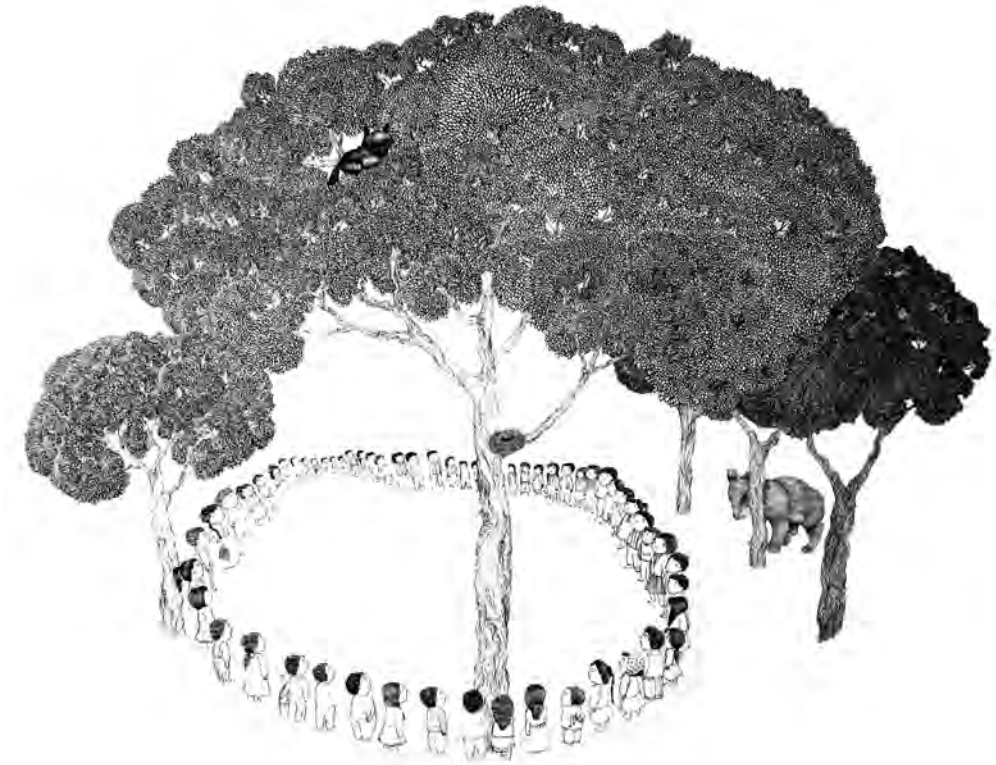
So, in Britain we are spluttering towards doomsday. We do not make (and are losing the knowledge to design) the goods we consume. Politicians are generally ignorant of this. In 2009 Alan Sugar, an eighties electronics entrepreneur and failed football investor, was given a ceremonial post by Gordon Brown's government on account of having a popular reputation as a "computer pioneer". But Sugar's "industrial" business had become moribund because he made no investment in manufacturing, research, development, training or design. He made no investment in them because he never actually had them in the first place.

Instead, Sugar's business was based on the buying-in and assembling of imported Chinese components. He started with electric aerials for cars and graduated to primitive computers. Alan Sugar could not explain a rivet, still less how a complementary metal-oxide-semiconductor (CMOS) chip works. Yet he was hailed by politicians, at least for a while, as some sort of industrial champion. Anyway, now the Chinese can do it better all by themselves and our industry czar does game shows.

The inability to make things is not merely a matter of imminent economic bankruptcy, it is cultural bankruptcy too. Civilizations are remembered by their artefacts, not by their credit default swaps or public sector borrowing requirements. Yet there is very, very little that is essentially British. To say this is not quaint nostalgia or xenophobia, but a very loud alarm.

A cross-country journey in Britain is a chastening experience for anyone concerned with the psychic and material wealth of the nation. Take Liverpool, now a scene of somewhat tentative but nonetheless impressive regeneration. There is a bold new waterfront conference centre designed by one of the country's leading architects, a great symbol of Liverpool's resurgence. And every single building material and item of monitoring and evaluation was foreign-made, from plasterboard through glass to control systems. We scarcely even make bricks in this country. Liverpool has some splendid new hotels, where once only a seedy boozer might have been found. And they have Korean flat screen TVs and German lifts and French sanitary-ware and linen.

You travel from London to Liverpool on a Virgin-branded train that was designed and made in Italy. Your Lime Street minicab is Czech. Returning to London, you get into a Mercedes-Benz taxi: a London cab made in Stuttgart. Your mood might be raised by the sight of the streets being cleaned by



German machinery. Your journey may take in Great Russell Street; here is the heroically modernist TUC building with a Lexus parked outside. Did the union boss with his Japanese luxury car so arrogantly parked not find something squirm-making in his choice? This is the street where John Ruskin, dismayed at the squalor of London and the state of the nation, decided to take direct action and moved from lofty art criticism to… sleeves-rolled-up street-sweeping.

Is it just crude sentiment that makes all of this so sad? No, because a country that loses the ability to make the goods it needs loses several other things. First, a sense of national identity. Second, the ability to maintain the upstream and downstream resources in education, research and development, and design and marketing which manufacturing demands. And as a result, it also loses access to pride, dignity and pleasure.

Mrs Thatcher told us that grubby old factories had no place in a mature economy. We could get rich selling each other cappuccinos and equally frothy financial instruments. And for a while she was right. But now that the bottom has so very emphatically fallen out of the derivatives market, we can see how very, very wrong she was.

The political view of manufacturing was one that thought it a good idea to have Finance Directors, as opposed to engineers, run companies. It's not a good idea at all. The cold metrics of profit and loss are not necessarily the last word in authentic and worthwhile industrial leadership. People who talk about the "constructive conditions of enterprise calculation" are the same people who opened the door to corporate raiders.

Folk hero among this barbarian tribe was the late Bruce Wasserstein, who saw great companies only as a money resource to be looted. Was Wasserstein actually interested in the recipes and baking of biscuits when he advised on the creation of merged company RJR Nabisco in 1985? His successors are still at it all over the finance pages. They used to be called asset-strippers. Now they are called experts on corporate finance.

The trade benefits of manufacturing don't require much emphasis in a country where we are all dragging around more than five times our own weight in mood-altering deficit, but there are even more important occult advantages. If you make things, you need to understand ideas, materials, markets, skills. If you make money, you just need the morals of a reprobate and the manners of a dancing master. And when you make things, you restore that essential practical and moral connection between effort and reward. It is as clear as the cross-section of a rivet. Of course, this was a connection carelessly lost when we wanted the economy run like a casino rather than a workshop.

This was all beautifully explained in a regrettably obscure 1944 pamphlet by W. Julian King, a Californian engineer. King's *Unwritten Laws of Engineering* was recently reissued by the American Society of Mechanical Engineers, but should be made a part of the national curriculum and incorporated into any electable government's manifesto. The 'unwritten laws' are not about physics, but behaviour. As opposed to the insolent selfishness of the usurer or the recklessness of the gambler, manufacturing requires social cohesion, personal responsibility, teamwork, commitment and vision. It needs clarity and accuracy, not obfuscation and dissimulation. Longwave integrity is more valuable than shortwave greed.

The manufacturing process demands that individuals both be decisive and share information. And this process occurs on an orderly, progressive scale that positively stimulates personal human development: you start with an idea, which becomes a more elaborate specification, and is in turn mass-produced, distributed, consumed, recycled. At each stage, additional

cumulative skills are required and generated. And, as King explains, this process teaches that it's better to do a modest job well than an ambitious one badly. Somehow, that last sentence reminds us of the banking crisis.

It does not matter whether you call it engineering, technology, design, craft or, possibly, even art. Whatever it is called, a system which gives priority to an engagement with products over a lust for quick returns is a more stable and wholesome one than a system in which derivatives are a more reliable source of wealth than making a teapot. And it is, ultimately, a system more likely in the long run to make profits. Yes, Keynes said in the long run we are all dead, but Keynes, we now know, was wrong about most things.

The loss of manufacturing is poignant in a country that produced Josiah Wedgwood, a man who sensed all the opportunities of the Industrial Revolution. He knew how to make things and how to sell them. He employed designers. He understood market segmentation and brand development. But he also knew how to use a pyrometer.

The same economists who told us we could manage without the capital-intensive bother and rather difficult business of making things also told us we could survive with our "creative industries". This is actually a preposterous delusion. There's no gainsaying the creative genius of Jonathan Ive, who has given such seductive sculptural form to the influential products of Apple Computer, but his brilliance would count as nothing in Britain where there is no native consumer electronics manufacturer. This in the country with some claim to have pioneered modern computing.

Besides computers, we no longer make, or no longer have a significant presence in the manufacture of, aircraft, consumer electronics, avionics, medical equipment, trucks, optical equipment, furniture, sports goods, clothes, building materials, white goods, cranes, textiles, bulk chemicals, machine tools, glass or china. (Yes we have some car companies, but Aston-Martins may soon all be made in Austria, and don't bet on Mini staying in Oxford when the German economy takes a hit. And it's only a matter of time before Tata starts making Jaguars and Land-Rovers in India.)

This is not just tragic, it's pitiable. And it's ruinous. Manufacturing requires extraordinary and valuable disciplines in training and education. It stimulates both the economy and culture. That can't be said of Britain's flourishing service industries: we do very well with "security" firms employing bull-necked oiks who will clamp your BMW. We are absolutely terrific at mini-cabs and home-delivery fast food. Although, it must be

admitted, even our call centres are all migrating to Bangalore, and M&S manufactures its knickers in China and Indonesia.

Ruskin, meditating as he took direct action and swept the streets, knew that people who understand how to make things are morally and practically satisfied. And they are also economically secure. The terrible reckoning we are about to confront is that when you abandon the skills and technologies involved in manufacturing, it's very difficult to get them back. The design skills we are so proud of cannot forever be sustained in autonomous isolation from manufacturing. What we'll have left is lots of economists and management consultants and finance directors who got it all so very badly wrong for the rest of us while getting so very badly rich themselves.

Of course, trade is immensely significant. But you cannot trade unless you have real goods to sell. The warning John Ruskin gave a century and a half ago is more frighteningly resonant today: 'Men don't and can't live by exchanging articles, but by producing them. They don't live by trade, but by work'.

Consider the engine Max Friz designed for the first BMW motorbike, the R32 of 1923. Friz's career began as an apprentice to the Kuhn factory at Cannstatt, just outside Stuttgart. Kuhn's speciality was making double-acting steam engines. Friz moved onto Mercedes-Benz where he designed the engine for the car that won the 1914 French Grand Prix, then became one of the founders of the new Bayerische Motoren Werke in Munich. He first made record-breaking aero-engines, then turned to motorbikes.

The entire fortune of the vast BMW empire was based on the firm's ability to design and manufacture this engine. BMW has never departed from the essential proposition that it should design and manufacture the best possible engines. Doing this with absolute consistency has created one of the most powerful brands in the world: those three letters have become shorthand for an incalculably valuable reputation for expertise in the making of things.

Elegiacally, at least if you are British, Friz's design was actually based on an original by Douglas of Bristol. Of course, Douglas no longer exists: it went unceremoniously out of business in 1957. Now no-one in Britain knows how to make a motorbike engine. It is not just expertise and exports that have been lost, but pride, pleasure and dignity.

We would have a greater number of Ruskin's noble and happy human beings if we still made motorbikes.

# The Pleasures and Perils of Food

*by David E. Cooper*

Food has a place – a central one, some would hold – in reflections on the good life. What, how, when, and with whom we eat are questions to which people should attend when considering how their lives might go better. Indeed, food isn't just worth thinking about, it is something which it is good – to amend Claude Lévi-Strauss's remark on animals – to think *with.* Attention to questions about eating might help to refine people's understanding of what a good life is; or, at any rate, refine their understanding of different and competing conceptions of it – their appreciation, as it were, of what is on the table.

Certainly there have been, historically, many competing views of the value of eating. These views tended to congregate towards two poles – gastrophilia and gastrophobia. This polarisation has sometimes been institutionalised, especially in societies strictly divided into castes or classes. In India, for example, the way of the Brahmin or priestly caste was an ascetic one, while the warrior-nobles – the Kshatriyas – were fabled for their appetite and indulgence in feasting. There is some truth, too, in hackneyed images of a medieval Britain in which monks ate a plate of gruel in freezing refectories while Lords, Ladies and their dogs tore into great hunks of meat before a roaring fire.

But the polar opposition between gastrophilia and gastrophobia is found, as well, in the pages of those who, over the centuries, have written about the place of eating in human life. A good place to locate gastrophiliac pronouncements is nineteenth-century France – unsurprisingly, perhaps, given its legacy of dishes and dining practices to the modern world. The

French view was straightforward: the primary purpose of human life is happiness in the form of pleasure, and eating good food is a central component in the pursuit of pleasure. According to the gastronome, Anthelme Brillat-Savarin, in his *Physiology of Taste*, taste is the sense which 'procures us most enjoyment', hence each of us should strive to become a 'great gourmand of nature'. His contemporary, Antoine Carême – chef to the Tsars and to the Rothschilds – held that cooking is 'the art which renders the most important service to life'. For his successor as France's leading chef, Auguste Escoffier, 'good cooking', quite simply, 'is the foundation of true happiness'. The French, it seems, took these dithyrambs to food seriously: at a banquet hosted by Talleyrand, forty-eight dishes were served, while some years later at Philippe's, a Parisian restaurant, the meal prepared for members of a dining club took them eighteen hours to eat.

The French, of course, did not invent gastrophilia. In ancient Athens, a special name was coined – *opsophogai* (literally, 'relish-eaters') – for devoted connoisseurs of seafood in particular. One gourmet, it is reported, elongated his neck so that he could enjoy for just a moment longer the sensation of a fish sliding down his throat, while another practised eating scalding food so that he could swallow choice pieces from the pot before it had cooled sufficiently for his fellow diners to try. China, too, has long been famous for the interest taken in eating, and particularly for the range of foods people were keen or willing to sample. Ming dynasty delicacies, it seems, included owl, donkey, tiger, fox, rat, lizard, and sea-slug. Things may not have changed too much since then. The travel writer, Colin Thubron, recounts arriving at a restaurant in China just before it closed for the night, but whose friendly chef nevertheless managed to rustle up a meal of shredded cat soup and braised python with mushrooms.

Gastrophilia is not a difficult attitude to understand, or perhaps sympathise with. Nevertheless, there have always been plenty of critics – advocates, on various grounds, of gastrophobia. For them, eating for enjoyment is not a constituent in the good life. If pleasure is a dimension of living well at all, then this is not the pleasure of the table – not, at any rate, the kind of heaving table typically sat at by the gastrophile. For some gastrophobes, enjoyment of food is dangerous since it all too easily becomes addictive. Gluttony is a sort of enslavement. 'What shall I say about the belly, the queen of the passions?', asked the thirteenth-century monk, Gregory of Sinai. 'It has mastered me', he laments, 'and I worship

it as a slave'. Even if enjoyment of food does not addict or enslave, it is nevertheless seen by many critics as a distraction from what really matters in living an authentically human life – contemplation, say, or constant lucidity. 'Monks should not concern themselves with what they eat', wrote Gregory's Japanese contemporary, the Zen master Dogen. 'Just take what is there. If it's good, enjoy it; if it's bad, eat it without distaste … eat enough to avoid starving … and do not pass judgement on food'.

This indifference to what one eats has been advocated by many thinkers. Ludwig Wittgenstein, the story goes, told the woman in whose house he would be lodged for several weeks – no doubt to her consternation – that he didn't mind what he ate, provided it was the same thing for every meal. Wittgenstein had a powerful puritanical tendency, and perhaps his indifference to food was one which he cultivated because of an association of food with physical desires that he wished firmly to control. Certainly, in various cultures, eating has had its questionable associations. In her engaging book, *The Rituals of Dinner*, Margaret Visser writes of the association, in medieval and Renaissance times, between dining and violence. Several modern conventions of the dinner-party – using the fairly blunt knives provided on the table instead of bringing one's own pointed dagger; tasting the wine before pouring it for the guests – owe to the dining-room's reputation as a place where people were, not infrequently, stabbed or poisoned.

More ubiquitous have been associations between food and sex. In some languages, the words for eating and having sex are the same, and it is not hard to think of words referring to items of food or to eating practices which have found their way into sexual slang. Even when oral sex is left out of consideration, connections between eating and sex are striking. In both cases, for instance, the mouth comes into close contact with flesh, and as the author of the *Kama-Sutra* knew, sexually symbolic items of food, such as figs, are effective in the leisurely build-up to love-making. It is partly because of its erotic associations that, in most cultures for most of history, eating is something which men do separately from women. And it is these associations that have helped to encourage gastrophobia among people of a puritanical bent. For them, a Marquis de Sade story in which a jaded gourmet kills himself by burrowing into, and devouring, two huge, breast-shaped blancmanges says it all.

These days, of course, one hears little about the spiritual perils of gastrophilia – about its diverting people from contemplation or about its

contribution to sexual arousal. In an age where we are exhorted to 'respect' individual choices of 'lifestyles', it would be bad form to criticise people for eschewing a way of life with which indulgence in food might conflict. What one may certainly do these days – on good Millian, liberal principles - is to criticise individuals if their 'choice of lifestyle' harms other people. And it is, predictably, on this ground that today's perils of eating are identified. In particular, criticism of undisciplined gastrophilia focuses on its implications for health and the environment. Each month brings a new set of figures on the incidence of obesity, bulimia, diabetes, and other conditions caused by over-indulgence. According to a recent report, for example, 60 per cent of British children are expected, by 2020, to be obese by World Health Organization criteria. Moral censure, though, is passed not on the quality of the lives led by the obese or bulimic, but on the costs they represent to taxpayers footing the NHS bill. Each month also brings depressing figures on the environmental impact of Western food consumption – on, for instance, the level of carbon emission due to the 18,000 air-miles which, apparently, the distances covered by the ingredients of an average shopping basket tot up to. As the example shows, however, it is not the individual's way of relating to animals or the wider natural order which environmentalist critics of modern eating criticise but the effects on, say, global warming and water resources of rearing billions of cattle for food.

No one should downplay the perils for health, human or ecological, of the ways in which many of us eat today. But it is important not to forget the terms in which older debates between gastrophiles and gastrophobes were conducted – important, that is, not to let the stridently pragmatic or utilitarian priorities of modern moralising obscure an older discourse of the good life for an individual. The ninth-century Zen Buddhist master, Huangbo, contrasted 'sensual eating', which only 'seeks gratification', with 'wise' eating. By the latter, he meant not simply or mainly prudent and healthy eating, but a way of food which was consonant with a way of enlightenment. Wise eating, in this sense, is a constituent in the good life.

Is this to take sides against the gastrophiles and in favour of the gastrophobes? Not necessarily, for we need to recognise how much gastrophiles and gastrophobes had in common. Recall Escoffier's claim that 'true happiness' is founded on good eating, and consider Brillat-Savarin's famous line, 'Tell me what you eat and I'll tell you what kind of man you are'. Both men are expressing the belief that what and how

a person eats is a fundamental dimension of the character of his or her life, not an incidental or accidental aspect of the person's wellbeing. But this is a belief which is also expressed by gastrophobes. For them, too, reflection on food and the accommodation of eating within one's life as a whole is central to deliberation on the good life. The gastrophobic Socrates, for example, judged that the fish-eating and similar gastronomic indulgences of rich Athenians went cheek-in-jowl with indolence, the use of perfume, prostitution and other vices of a 'luxurious city', in which no one can live a properly balanced, disciplined and virtuous life. A couple of centuries later, Epicurus reiterated Socrates's point. No epicure in the modern sense, Epicurus regarded 'a small pot of cheese' as luxury enough and condemned gourmands, with their constant search for gratification, for their 'ingratitude' towards nature and the simple, but wholesome fare with which it has provided human beings.

Socrates and Epicurus in effect agree with Brillat-Savarin and Escoffier: to live well, a person must arrive at a reflective accommodation with food. They differ, of course, over what this accommodation should be – lunch at the Savoy (where Escoffier was the chef) or a small pot of cheese, exquisitely prepared oysters or a hunk of bread. Despite this difference, they can join forces in opposition to a powerful modern tendency, for which a sociologist has happily coined the term 'gastro-anomy'. This is the tendency for food and eating to have much less meaning and symbolic weight than it once possessed for people. Gregory of Sinai and Carême may disagree on what the significance of food in a person's life should be, but they can agree that gastro-anomic indifference to its significance is a failure properly to reflect on the good life.

Gastro-anomy is indeed a modern phenomenon, confined moreover to societies in which life no longer revolves around the family small-holding. In traditional societies, members of the family would cooperate on growing and preparing food, and meals would nearly always be eaten at home. The whole process, from sowing to ploughing, from cooking to consuming, served to structure domestic life, confirming roles and relationships within the family. Typically, families would belong in small communities, villages where – especially on festive occasions – communal meals would play an important part in expressing and cementing social structures.

These days, one reads, sitting down to eat a meal is the exception rather than the rule among young British people. Instead they eat on the hoof, they

'graze' their way through coffee shops, sandwich counters and take-away restaurants. Certainly, when they do sit down to eat, it is unlikely to be in the family home with their parents – and if it is, the odds are that the meal is not one that members of the family have cooperated on preparing. Indeed, it probably hasn't been prepared at all. Most meals consumed at home in the North-East of England, according to one survey, take ten minutes to get from the fridge, via the microwave, to the sofa in front of the TV.

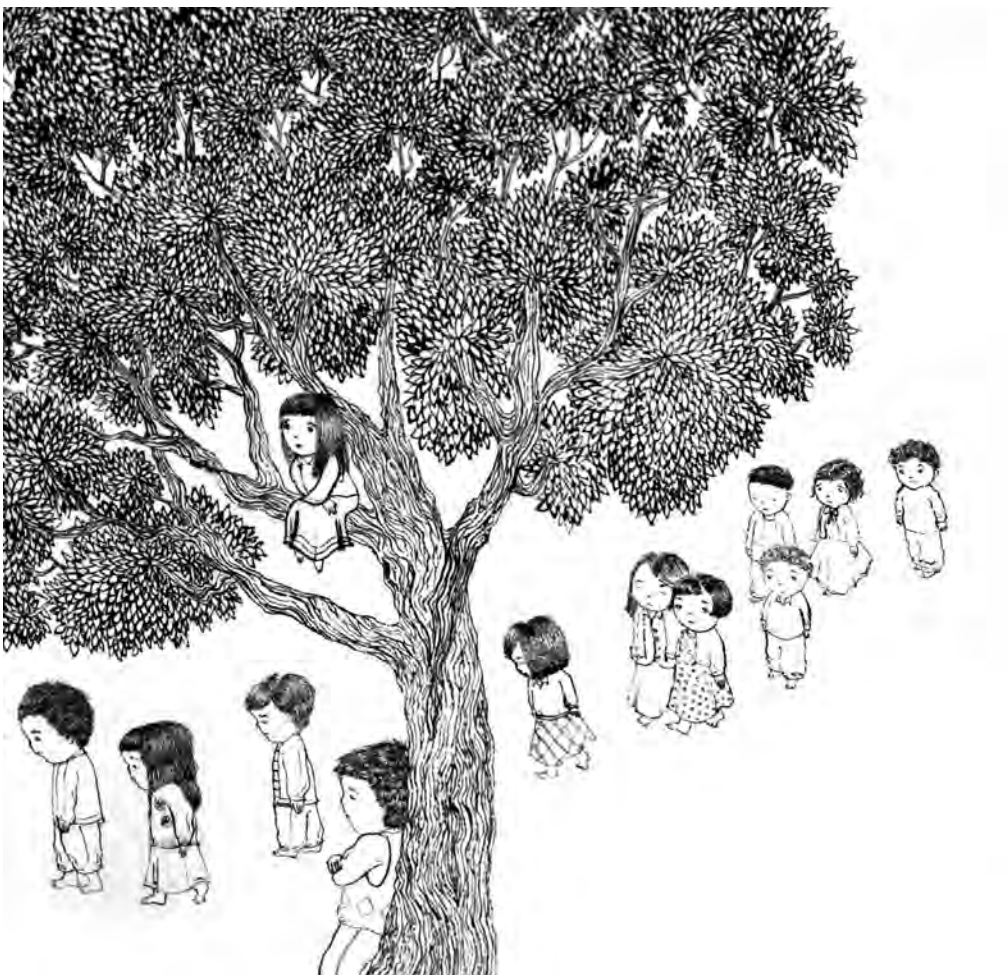
It isn't just changes in lifestyles which have encouraged nonchalance towards food and eating. In addition, there is the widespread ignorance – in societies where very few people still work on the land – of what is being eaten, where it came from, and the processes by which it was produced. Most food consumed in the UK originates in places few people have even heard of, with its provenance and constitution almost totally opaque to them. The food on the table has, in all likelihood, been manufactured through a technology (known as 'appropriationism') whereby raw materials, such as chickens, are converted into stuffs from which, somehow, the items on the plate – chicken-nuggets, say – eventually emerge. For the vast majority of consumers, it seems, this ignorance and opacity is not a matter of concern. It would be mistaken, incidentally, to cite the popularity of several TV food programmes as an objection to the suggestion that people are generally ignorant of, and indifferent to, the nature of what they are eating. Research suggests that few viewers focus on the food itself; the rest are intent on the charms, swearing, or antics of the celebrity chefs who slink or storm their way through the TV kitchens.

Julian Baggini concludes from his observation of food-shopping and eating habits in a Yorkshire town that it is only 'size, value [price] and convenience' which dictates what is bought and consumed. Any significance which food and mealtimes once had for people has given way, he adds, to 'utilitarian functionality'. Food, one might say, has become a mere commodity – used only to keep up energy levels or to provide pleasant sensations – and so, like plastic or nylon, is without symbolic weight.

For several contemporary authors, such as Michael Pollan in his lament on the modern American way of food, *The Omnivore's Dilemma*, this move from meaning to functionality is something to regret – for it is a denial of the intimacy with the natural world, and with each other, that eating represents. The distinguished American novelist, Barbara Kingsolver, describes in her book, *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle*, how she and her family

spent a year 'growing their own' on a rented smallholding in Virginia. This was, she writes, a 'metaphor' for a proper alignment to the natural world, to animals, and indeed to her husband, daughter and neighbours – an alignment in which the real significance of all these would show up and become salient. For Pollan, Kingsolver and others, the paramount 'peril' of eating in our modern culture is gastro-anomy, the loss of a sense of the significance that food should have. Worse still, perhaps, it is the loss of the sense that something has been lost. (Martin Heidegger's complaint, in his writings on the impact of industrial technology, was that people are not even aware of the 'homelessness' and 'rootlessness' it has induced.)

I began with the polarity of gastrophilia and gastrophobia, but what has emerged is that this is an opposition that needs transcending in any reflective



attempt to accommodate food and eating into a life well led. The gastrophobes I have discussed may have been reflective, but they have also been too dismissive of food's contribution to the good life. Meanwhile, gastrophiles of the sort I quoted have embraced a restrictively hedonistic conception of the good life to which eating contributes. Theirs has been an Epicurean vision of happiness which not everyone – including, as we've seen, Epicurus himself – would share. Recalling Huangbo's distinction between 'sensual' and 'wise' eating, the need is not for gastrophilia or gastrophobia, but – to coin yet another term – gastrosophia, the application of wisdom to the way of food.

There's another reason to transcend, or rethink, the gastrophile versus gastrophobe opposition. The contrast implies that there are two different classes of people, the philes and the phobes. But philia and phobia, arguably, are not found just at the social level, but within the psyche of the individual. The social anthropologist, Jack Goody, has argued that, in many cultures – ours included – there tends to be 'ambivalence' on the part of individuals towards eating. There is a tension, for example, between a desire to indulge and a respect for self-discipline, between gratification and conscience. This is, of course, an ambivalence that restaurants skillfully exploit, when they manage to sell some dishes on the ground of their healthy, slim-line merits, and other dishes on the ground that, 'wicked' as they are, the diner deserves a moment of self-indulgence after a hard day's work. So, shredded carrot on the healthy options section of the menu, 'Death-by-Chocolate' on the irresistible desserts section.

It is not surprising, these days, that there should be the ambivalence of which Goody speaks. For what has largely disappeared from modern food practices in the West are the guidance and constraints implicit in the notion of a *cuisine*. Traditional French and even British cuisines did not consist simply of certain edible stuffs and techniques of cooking. They were disciplines of eating, replete with taboos, principles and standards which provided individuals with a way of accommodating to food, of integrating it into their lives. In an age when food is essentially 'functional' – something to swallow for energy or nice sensations – it is no longer located in the context of a cuisine. One of the ambitions of gastrosophia should be to rehabilitate the idea of a cuisine, thereby reducing the ambivalence – the neurosis, even – about food which has become so widespread. Reduction of this ambivalence is, in turn, a prelude to retrieving a place for food in the economy of the good life for an individual.

# Connotation

*by Theodore Dalrymple*

One of the salient features of modern public life is the triumph of connotation over denotation. The penumbra of emotional and ethical associations of a word come to be more important than the examination of reality itself. This is because it is easier and more pleasurable to manipulate words than to change, or even to recognise, reality. By this means, we come to inhabit a verbally-constructed virtual world that is comfortable because we think that we understand and control it.

I could give many examples. Education is generally regarded as a good thing, and an educated population as a *sine qua non* of a modern economy – leaving aside the non-economic advantages to individuals of being well-educated. It follows, then (does it not?), that the longer children and young adults spend in education, the better educated they will be, and the fitter for life in a modern economy which, in dialectical relationship, will flourish because of the highly-educated nature of the population working in it.

An educated person has a stock of information, is able to think and reason for himself, is curious about the world, is able to unmask evident absurdities, is capable of refined discrimination, knows how to go about improving his mind and has a determination to do so. Who, except an obscurantist, could be against more education?

The penumbra of positive connotation that surrounds the word education (and the negative connotation that surrounds any opposition to its prolongation) obviates the need to examine very closely what actually goes on in the name of prolonged education, or any of its possible negative effects. Mr Blair's exclamation "Education! Education! Education!" launched billions of pounds of expenditure on education on the supposition that it was, and must necessarily have been, *ex officio* as it were, a wise investment, and not a frivolous (and corrupt) waste of money.

Once you look more closely at the reality, however, comfortable feelings tend to evaporate. Reality is that which cannot be mocked, and no number of procedural outcomes – for example, a pre-arranged and arbitrary percentage of the young population attending university and obtaining degrees – will alter the truth of the underlying reality. If people cannot read, write or reckon very well, it doesn't matter what certificates you give them that suggest the contrary. Procedural outcomes are connotation made bureaucratic flesh.

Let us take the term 'social housing' as a further example. The word 'social' has something warm and comforting about it, reminiscent of Tiny Tim exclaiming "God bless us, every one". Because of its etymological and phonological relationship with the word 'social', the word 'sociable' becomes part of the connotation of social housing. The latter also protects poor or vulnerable people from the cold blast of the market-place; giving them a decent home irrespective of their ability to pay for it, thus attenuating the effects of their poverty.

Whether or not any of this is actually so, there are also some pretty serious practical disadvantages or drawbacks to social housing that are seldom thought about, precisely because of the positive connotations of the word 'social'. For example, much of the conduct of the tenants of social housing is not notably social or sociable, quite the reverse in fact. The extreme reluctance of councils to evict tenants means that one of the motives for such tenants to conform to standards of reasonable behaviour is lost; only people with the most sanguine view of human nature would fail to appreciate what this might mean in practice, at least in quite a lot of cases.

Access to social housing is by definition a privilege or benefit granted by a bureaucracy; if it were not, there would be no demand for it in the first place. But the bureaucracy that grants it is not unitary, it is rather divided into little fiefdoms. This means that the privilege is not geographically transferable; just because you are given social housing in Truro does not mean that it will be available to you in Newcastle, and vice versa.

Since most people granted the privilege or benefit (as they suppose it) of social housing will be reluctant or afraid to give it up, they will in effect be trapped by it into remaining where they are. It is possible, of course, that they will not want to move; but if they do want to move, for whatever reason, they will soon discover that they are prisoners of the benefit that they have received. Their world will necessarily contract – unless they are strong enough to make a complete break from their benefit – to a small radius

around their social housing.

A further example of the triumph of connotation over denotation is the charity shop that is now the most characteristic of all British institutions. How nice of us to give things away to charity shops, and to make contributions to charity by buying from such shops! The connotations of the word 'charity' blind us to the reality: that many or most such shops are, morally if not legally, fraudulent. They are in effect elaborate charades, or front organisations.

It is easy to verify this by looking at the published accounts of many so-called charities and their trading organisations. Despite receiving their goods free of charge, and being manned principally by volunteers, and despite having reduced rates to pay and often reduced rent as well, charity shops often transfer little of their turnover to the charitable arm of their organisation (where, of course, much of that little will also disappear). In one notable case – with hundreds of shops – I discovered that it was 8 per cent only. When I asked the elderly ladies who were helping out in my local branch of this particular charity how much of the money they took in the shop went to charitable causes, they opened their eyes wide and said "All of it, of course". In other words, a deception was, *de facto* if not *de jure*, being

practised upon them by the so-called charity; even if the ladies derived personal benefit from the interest and social contact that working in the shop gave them, this is not why they thought that they were working there.

Where did 92 per cent of the money that they took go, then? It is not difficult to guess. One in six employed persons in Britain now works in the 'charity' sector; in other words, charity is a career like any other. It helps to reduce unemployment, it recycles old goods, it provides a social service to people who might otherwise be isolated. No doubt these are all estimable effects, but they are not what most people suppose that charity means. Once again connotation fights denotation, and triumphs in the struggle.

It might, of course, be said that *'twas ever thus*; and if *'twas ever thus*, there is nothing to worry about, or nothing more than there ever was to worry about. It is an inevitable consequence of the ability of language to convey truth that it should also be able to convey lies, be they implicit or explicit. Nothing has changed, nothing is changing and nothing will ever change.

I cannot prove that the triumph of connotation over denotation is new, or at any rate more complete than ever before. But there are reasons for thinking that it is so. The first is that the intrusion of officialdom into our lives is greater than ever before, and that public bodies with powers of coercion have become more numerous, so that the need to appear to be conferring a benefit when actually tyrannising, circumscribing freedom and imposing arduous obligations is greater than ever before. The use of connotation to the detriment of denotation is obviously advantageous in these circumstances.

The second is that, in a secularised world, there is a greater need than ever before to justify every action from some rational principle rather than by reference to authority, custom or religious dictate; and this, paradoxically, has the effect not of making us more rational, but more prone and susceptible to rationalisation, for of course it is not possible to examine every claim about every action very deeply. A simulacrum of a rational justification will do, as a kind of shorthand.

Whether or not this be so, we do well to mistrust fine-sounding words, mere abstractions, in the mouths of those who, in an ever more regulated society, would rule us – for our own good, of course – and who would disarm criticism by the use of mere connotation.

# The Cobbler and the Painter

*by Aengus Dewar*

*An artist's understanding of why traditional figurative painting will always be relevant, and a brief look at misconceptions which sometimes surround it.*

There is an incident I often recall when I finish a painting. Where exactly it took place is never mentioned, but it involved Apelles, the most celebrated artist of an era defined by Alexander the Great, with whom the painter spent much time. One afternoon, after considerable labour, Apelles put down his brushes and stood back from his latest painting. It seemed to him to be finished. Before he could be quite certain though, he needed to subject it to a test. He propped it up where his studio faced onto a busy street and concealed himself behind on a stool where he could listen to the remarks of passers by. Before long a cobbler in the company of some others stopped to look. Such a pity, announced the cobbler breezily, that the painting is flawed. And he pointed out to his friends how a sandal in the piece lacked a thong. As soon as he had passed on, Apelles whipped the painting back into his studio and set to work correcting his error.

The story comes from Pliny, who was too fond of yarns to always be taken seriously. But it is not for its historical worth that I am drawn to this anecdote. Instead it is as an indicator of how immediately Apelles' artistic language could be understood by laymen. So much so, on the surface at least, that they could confidently find fault with what they saw. Until a hundred years ago there would have been nothing unusual about this. People expected art to present itself in an accessible idiom, even if its message was obscure. Since then, however, the language of art has become much more diverse, and the decoding services of expert linguists are often required. This is not, by the way, the zeroing-in of a sniper's rifle on modern movements. I see no merit in taking a wrecking ball to those efforts of others which are cherished.

Rather, I want to lay out a reminder of some of the qualities which make traditional painting worthwhile, a morsel of which was chewed on by the cobbler. I do feel they are sometimes forgotten in the Babelesque hubbub that surrounds us.

Although this is intended to be upbeat, I would be dodging a bullet if I began without taking into account some of the criticisms that are made of the sort of painting I have always loved. So I shall try to do that immediately. Figurative painting, narratives, allegories, portraits with pomp, and all the other stuff your grandparents used to like: these are inescapably traditional. Within the art world, *traditional* is not often a word that gets everyone bubbling with excitement. It is frequently seen as synonymous with the tastes of a set who wear signet rings and get worked up by which way the port moves round the table. Any painter who has the word associated with his efforts soon finds himself credited with the same creative oomph as a bagpiper. There are understandable reasons for this. Art these days is supposed to push, progress and test. Its best practitioners experience a thrill at the words *explore* and *challenge*. Good art picks up on the aromas of its epoch and asks questions about them. Good artists have a duty to set the pace. Intellectuals like Sartre underscored this with the opinion that literature, like fruit, is best when fresh, that it has a shelf life after which it grows musty. Nowhere is this belief more tangible than in politics. If a politician uses the word *modernise* it is inevitably as an indicator of something positive. To be of relevance, each generation must search out its reflection in the contemporary and try to evolve it. Art which is old-fashioned does not understand this. It looks backwards and can seem irredeemably quaint, like an elderly bard hobbling about at a rave, croaking madrigals and addressing everyone as thou. More sinister stuff can sometimes be ascribed to it as well. After all, the past is the intellectual territory of a flat earth, where each kitchen featured a girl-sized chain. For four hundred years, with a sprinkle of exceptions like Artemesia Gentileschi, figurative painting revolved solely around men. Surely, the thinking goes, it should be left behind in its own oppressive bygoneness; the kind where epilepsy could be mistaken as demonic, the best medical minds recommended trepanning a migraine, and art was intended for unsavoury elites.

Many of the figurative painters I know become uncomfortable when faced with these observations. They worry that without adequate fighting talk the art they fashion might indeed be seen as outdated, or worse, irrelevant. Some make a stand beneath the banner of Beauty with a big B. But in any

public debate they soon find that the word is too slippery to allow a solid argument to accrete around it. Others ignore the shooting match and quietly press on. My own response is straightforward. I have always seen traditional painting as a language, not an end. Most of the criticism mentioned above assumes the opposite. Understood as a language, figurative art's relevance – or not – is determined by the subjects it speaks about, rather than the antique origins of its grammar. A language becomes redundant only when no one comprehends it, or its speakers uniformly communicate things that are of no interest to others. Of itself, it cannot be chastised any more than, say, French can.

Some of the critical voices, however, do not see this. They assume the chief interest of figurative painting is not to convey a meaning, but to capture the visible surface of the world around us, like a camera. Unsurprisingly, this misunderstanding gives rise to a particular charge: it is an art form that is too *derivative* to be of benefit. A great painter but a poor artist, runs the shorthand refrain. Everyone with a passing awareness of the arts is acquainted with the argument. So long has it been doing the rounds that it has by now acquired sacred cow status. Like many other chubby heifers, however, it turns out to be more moo than milk when approached. Figurative paintings nearly always seek to transmit a message. But in order to do so successfully they depend – as all languages do – on our familiarity with identifiable and understandable forms. In other words, they cannot be articulate unless they are derivative. Without an adequate measure of this quality, the gallery walls would play host only to unintelligible mutterings. Without any of it, they fall perfectly silent. It takes a rare breed of lily-livered artist to fashion work that is mute.

The charge of being too derivative is often followed by another complaint: *originality*. More properly, the claim that today's traditional figurative paintings lack it and just rehash what has been done before. Here, I am stumped. For most of my twenties, I thought that this was about the old-fashioned visual style that figurative painting uses to present itself. I subsequently realized, though, that this could not be the case. If it was, those who offer the reproach would quibble also with any work of literature written in a language not of the author's unique invention. But they do not. Then I thought it might be about the issues that figurative painting tends to address: kindness, love, redemption and hope; ennui, despair, hatred and death; the divine, the human, the artistic and so on. This too left me no wiser because these are defining universals of the human experience, and

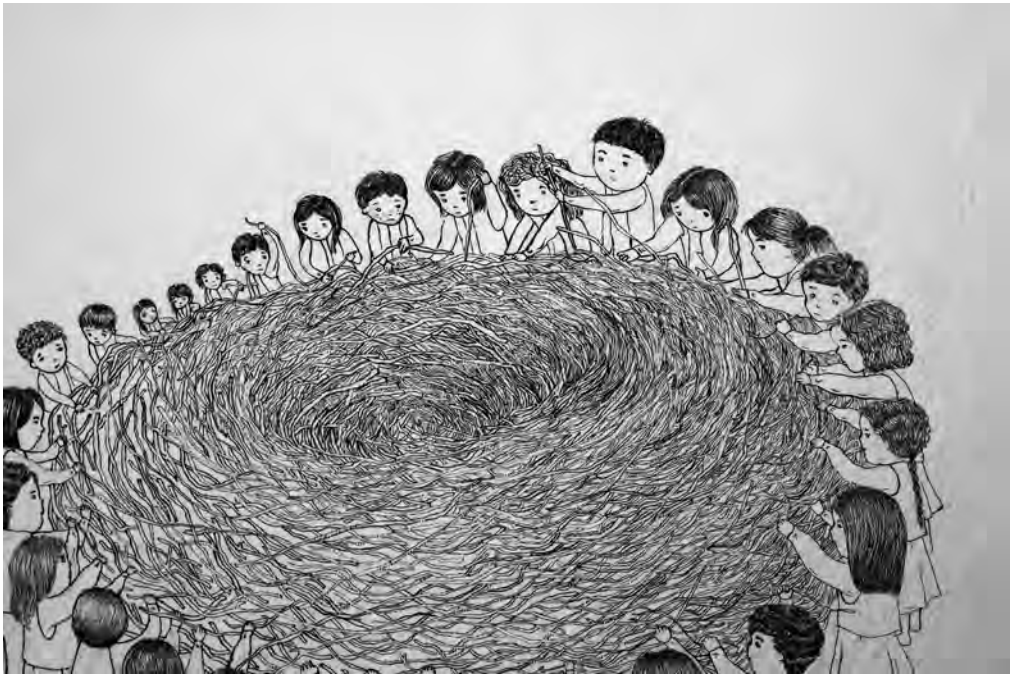
are usually the subject matter of other modes of art, which are themselves declared (inexplicably, I sometimes feel) notably original. I do believe that the tag is bandied about lazily. Outside circles of science and hefty morphine use, it is rare for even the brightest to conceive of something which is actually original. Rarer still that the rest of us 'get it', as the Eureka! fellowship invariably struggle to express their thoughts in accessible vernacular. Art that has the originality label glued onto it by enthusiasts is usually less Olympian than the word implies. Normally it is just novel. The distinction is profound, and cheerfully confusing the two does a disservice to all. Moreover, even if it is achieved, originality does not imply importance. As science attests, the bulk of revolutionary new thoughts lead us nowhere rather than out-there, and are soon shelved. Art is no different. Pursuing originality for its own sake is something that figurative painting should not have to worry about. Its most widespread malaise is not that its practitioners often have banal things to say, but that they are not fluent enough to make those banal things shine. However, this is a failing common to every mode of art, not just my own, and certainly does not merit a dismissal.

It is well known, of course, that the first person to sincerely consider dismissing figurative art from the cultural lexicon was Plato. I like Plato, but I am not sure he immediately would have approved of a committed painter like me. He blew hot and cold on artists' activities for reasons that are well enough known. In his opinion, *mimetic* art, or art that convincingly portrayed the world around us, was one of the rogues that needed an eye kept on it lest it mislead its audience. It is worth noting the philosopher's particular bugbear here. It had nothing to do with originality or being derivative. Instead the philosopher worried that such art was too persuasive to be left unsupervised. He went further when he stated that it can bewitch. He was right. It is precisely this quality that has made figurative painting such an enduring and effective mode of expression. It uses a visual idiom which is comprehended by all who can see. Even if a painting of this type addresses something we are not familiar with, we need no special knowledge to take the first steps towards understanding. It is pitched in our ocular language, with its arms democratically open to all onlookers. It is also versatile, as well-suited to a whispered haiku of minute observation as it is to a bellowing epic of pathos. More importantly, it gets in amongst our emotions. Plato knew that this is the territory in which we tend to site ourselves when making momentous decisions. A big problem for him, therefore, was not

what mimetic art represented, but how easily it could sway us.

My first experience of being influenced in this fashion was a surprise. I was sixteen, and although not much interested in art, was at an exhibition that showcased Caravaggio's 'Supper at Emmaus'. Perhaps the least discussed quality of a good figurative painting is its ability to speak to senses other than the eyes. Suggested sounds, smells and textures come pouring out of the best examples. This has the effect of transforming them from coloured pieces of canvas into living beings. It is a curious experience, nowhere more so than at a crowded gallery. From within that still image of Caravaggio's, I could hear one disciple's disbelieving mutters as he recognised Christ, the scrape of his astonished companion's chair pushing backwards, and the reedy creak of the fruit basket he had hastily placed teetering on the edge of the table. More followed: the smell of unkempt men and a steaming capon, the coarse texture of worn-out clothes. The entire melange coalesced into a sort of completeness, and hooked a broad, dirty finger so firmly around my credulousness that I started to see something alive. This is a powerful sensation. The painting can seem to speak with a fluency approaching the signature character of a voice. The one unique to this work had much to say about surprise, recognition and hope – never mind the catechism it embodied for its original patron. The fact that I had only the sparsest experience of art gave the encounter the quality of an uplifting ambush. I got it! I – who knew nothing of painting – could hear what was being said! This is the immortal delight which an art form that is direct and articulate can bring to the uninitiated. Far from locking you out, its literalism and convincing sensuousness help to bring you in. I was gob-smacked at how that painted image could communicate so eloquently with someone who knew nothing of the metier. I had all the usual teenage disdain for religion, and yet I understood and empathised with those men at the inn.

For many of us, however, there are barriers to an experience of this kind. Not everyone responds well to standing in front of pictures of long-dead people in outdated clothes. The same can be the case for modern paintings that have opted to use the past for their idiom. They look like they belong to a place so distant from ours that it is off-putting. But making an effort to get close to them is always worthwhile. Spending time in the company of strangers can enliven us in ways we do not expect. Einstein spoke often of how the past informed him. And not inevitably in terms of his scientific considerations. He cautioned against the habit of getting too caught up in the here and now. To do so, he said, was to indulge a form



of prejudiced short-sightedness, and 'paltry and monotonous' thinking. Good figurative paintings may often use fashions which are not ours, but it would be a mistake to eschew them for their otherness. Otherness does not strip things of relevance. There are values and circumstances attached to humanity which have barely changed throughout history. They are universal and belong to all. Down the years, figurative painters have had as many doubts and convictions about them as we do. It would be a pity to let ourselves go deaf to their observations for want of a pair of jeans. When nuance is put aside, this is an art form that centres on people. The painted mirror is timeless. It reflects equally on us all, no matter how we dress.

Apart from the sensation it gave off, something else struck me on the afternoon I saw the Caravaggio. It was the virtuosity involved in making that painting. Using just his hand and eye, some pigments in an oily solution and sticks tipped with hair, someone had convinced me utterly that I was staring into another world. It is often forgotten just how difficult it is to pull off this kind of base-metal to gold alchemy. But it was not always so. Pliny recounts a tale that sums up the respect this ability once garnered. There was, he says, a competition between the Greek painters Zeuxis and Parrhasius. Zeuxis had it all sown up when he revealed a still-life of grapes so convincing that birds

flew close to peck. Game over, he announced to his rival, you can't beat that; but just for the sake of form we'd better remove the drape covering your work and give it a cursory glance. Go ahead, invited Parrhasius. He gestured for Zeuxis to uncover his painting. And guess what? Exactly. It was not a drape after all. Whereas Zeuxis had fooled the eyes of birds, Parrhasius had fooled the eyes of an artist. Zeuxis admitted his loss on the spot.

In our own age, it has been the case for some time now that many of those whose job is to write about art see little merit in an ability to craft an image well. People who esteem the technical fluency of a Parrhasius, they sometimes opine, are artistically uninitiated or vulgar. They revel merely in the surface illusion, peering like a chimpanzee at a TV screen, cut off from the embedded meanings and aims that should be discernible if the artwork is to be of any consequence. No doubt this is sometimes the case. But it implies two unfortunate suppositions which are not. The first is that a convincing surface illusion is always a trivial distraction. This is only ever so, however, for those who do not approach figurative painting as a language. The second is that virtuosity has nothing profound to offer. In fact, it does. Whatever we think about a well-crafted picture's message, time spent dwelling on the skill that made it possible is rarely wasted. Making the very difficult appear easy is uplifting and humanistic. It has not infrequently been known to inspire.

Those who have delighted in footage of Pelé at full tilt, finding unpredictable ways past every hindrance before the slick finish in the back of the net, understand the enriching effect of a virtuoso display. The rules of the game, the dimensions of the pitch and the best efforts of the opposition range themselves tightly around the performer. It is too difficult. It cannot be done. But the virtuoso shows us that it can. Anyone with a generous spirit finds it rousing to see the impossible managed. Most of us are too conscious of our fallibility to fail to grasp its significance. It reminds us of what we might be capable of if we tried a bit harder. The logic-defying compression of three dimensions onto a flat surface is the painter's equivalent of a moment in Pelé's boots. It involves a gladiator principle whereby the greater the difficulties imposed around the performer, the more extraordinary their performance becomes if it is successful. Pelé's ability to thrill emerges because of – not in spite of – the restrictions that surround him while he plays. In figurative painting, the pitch, beyond whose white lines painters strive not to stray, is the natural world; the ball is the pigment at the end of the brush; and the goal of their craftsmanship is to transport the onlooker to a place they can believe

in, not just intellectually but also sensually. Just as it was for Pelé, the object is not to break the constraints, but instead to attempt the altogether more difficult task of rising above them from within. This is what Leonardo did, what Rembrandt did, what Velásquez did. It *is* what figurative painting tries to do. Joshua Reynolds encapsulated the principle with succinctness:

> every opportunity, therefore, should be taken to discountenance that false and vulgar opinion that rules are the fetters of genius. They are fetters only to men of no genius...

The proof of this stentorian claim is not difficult to find. Michelangelo never once escaped the confines of figurative representation. The artistic world he crafted was limited entirely to the masculine body, even when he depicted women. He was a stickler for line, for rhythm, for proportion, for clarity and for highly specific shape. The cantankerous Florentine subjected himself to a host of limitations and rules, none of which were ever broken in a finished work of his. The orthodoxy of today's art schools would suggest that this was a mistaken approach. Clearly, it was not. Michelangelo's genius and artistic range were never retarded by the strictures that surrounded the art he made. If anything, they were enhanced. No other western artist, certainly none that has been emancipated from rules, has ever created work of equivalent awe and philosophical scale. If an art-mode's value is to be found in the scope and expressiveness it permits, figurative painting merits no accusations of parsimony.

Clearly other characteristics were prized by our forbears as well, but we do find them quicker to include verisimilitude in their qualitative judgements of artwork. The great boast of Phidias' gargantuan statue of Zeus at Olympia was that the god appeared as though he might rise from his seat at any moment. It was also noted how the lifelike appearance of a statue of Alexander by Lysippos, years after his death, gave one of the king's rivals such a shock when he came upon it unexpectedly that he was reduced to gibbering panic. Gathering sufficient life into an artwork so that it seems self-animating is testing enough. But as a spectacle, figurative pictures want more from themselves than just this. They search out a degree of *correctness*. Until a picture successfully communicates its own world to others, it remains unfulfilled, like a stationary Ferrari with no one behind the wheel. This harmonious union between the canvas and the viewer is pursued relentlessly.

Without it, the painter's effort is diminished. It is for this reason, not some excess of fussiness, that Apelles went back to the easel. The sandal he had painted was damaging the cobbler's willingness to believe. Without adequate belief, the sensuous world he had tried to create would remain compromised. An art form that gives weight to the opinion of its audience must always be quick to criticize itself.

More than once, I have used the 'Supper at Emmaus' as a starting point for my observations. I suppose this is because it is the picture I always recall

when, on gloomy days, I wonder what possessed me to become a painter. But there is something about that magnificent work that has not yet had a mention. Caravaggio made a glaring mistake when he painted it. The right hand of the disciple on Christ's left is too large to make any sense within the context of the optical rules Caravaggio followed. It is a monumental visual *non sequitur*. Theories abound as to how it could have happened. Some argue that it is deliberate and references – in an impossibly abstruse way – the right hand of God. More recently, it has been put down to a technical discrepancy between Caravaggio's judgement and a lens he was using as a visual aid (a brief exposure to some classical training in draughtsmanship enables us to see how unlikely this is). But the theorising does not matter. What does is that we, like the cobbler, can spot that Caravaggio made the mistake in the first place. This is the wonderful thing about figurative painting; even exceptional artists can get skewered by the scrutiny of an attentive layman. There is no running away, no ignoring the cobbler's eye. Yet even though it is an art form which attempts always to respect our powers of observation, naturalistic painting is not so inflexible that it forgets our capacity to make allowances. Caravaggio was not above returning his paintings to the easel if things went wrong ('The Taking of Christ' in the National Gallery of Ireland, for example, shows a substantial adjustment to the ear of Judas). But this time he did not. He knew we could absorb his error without much difficulty. He had confidence in our discernment. Apelles responded differently, but what is notable in the reaction of both men to their mistakes is how each, in their way, viewed the onlooker as an equal in the exchange. They judged us to be fluent in the language they were using. Fluent enough to know what is and is not acceptable. We are never locked out or talked down to. We are never treated as children.

I mentioned before how Plato identified the sway emotions can hold over us. With the exception of love, probably none is as powerful as pathos. The aptitude that allows us to empathise and feel something that has its existence entirely through another person is mighty stuff. It offers a meatier taste of the human condition than any intellectual report. For it to work though, a great deal must be communicated clearly. Pathos grows by dint of us witnessing change and consequence in the life of someone else. These qualities are hard to identify without a sense of past, present and future around the individuals or events we are watching. Legibility, then, is key. Without it, a work of art will struggle to direct our empathy towards others.

If this is the last plea I will make in figurative art's favour, it is also the most serious. When naturalistic painting turns into narrative – as it often does – it is beautifully suited to singing songs of deep emotion and significance. That single, still meditation you see on the gallery wall, that picture formed over many weeks and months, sometimes years, is rarely just a map of something once seen. It is more often a depiction of a moment of painful change. We revel in the poignant beauty of such stuff. It coaxes us into lifting our gaze over the parapet of our pettiness and our humdrum routines. And it is there, in that landscape beyond, that we come closest to grasping what it means to be human. It is a place which is not always broad, majestic and filled with light. Often it amounts to a muddy field. But either way, it is the territory where we are most likely to experience those uncommon moments of clarity, where for a second we discover our own significance and give ourselves some kind of meaning.

When all these things have been considered, I find it hard to imagine a world where figurative painting has been so worn out that it is cast aside. People were picking up base materials and fashioning them into mimetic works in Swabia 33,000 years ago. They were still at it in Lascaux 15,000 years later, as they were in Sumeria around 2,500 BC, as they were in Florence 4,000 years later again. Concentrating hard to observe and capture the world around us with our hands and eyes, whilst enriching the emerging piece with meaning, seems to be so embedded in the human condition that we have left traces of it beyond the reach even of history. It has been in us from the very start, and still is. What child does not revel – if only for a while – in the atavistic alchemy and pleasure of figurative drawing? When sometimes I hear contemporaries dismiss such stuff as old hat (a popular mantra in many university art departments, art colleges, and certain shiny corners of the gallery world) I glance back down that immense corridor of time and wonder if they perhaps intend shortly to declare eating to be an out-of-date activity. Figurative painting's time has not passed. As I mentioned at the start, a language does not die unless no one remains who can speak it. And today there are more people able to understand literal imagery than at any other period in history. Nor is this a language that has exhausted its possibilities. So long as we remain the complex and flawed creatures that we are, so long as we retain an interest in ourselves, this will be an art form that can communicate worthwhile things. *Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale her infinite variety*, Shakespeare said of Cleopatra. Indeed.

# The Power of the Parent

*by Judith Rich Harris*

When my book, *The Nurture Assumption*, was published in 1998, journalists compressed its message into three little words: Parents Don't Matter. It caused an uproar. I hadn't actually said those words – clearly, parents matter in some ways – but it was close enough. The fact that parents are important people in their children's lives doesn't mean that they have the power to determine how those lives will play out.

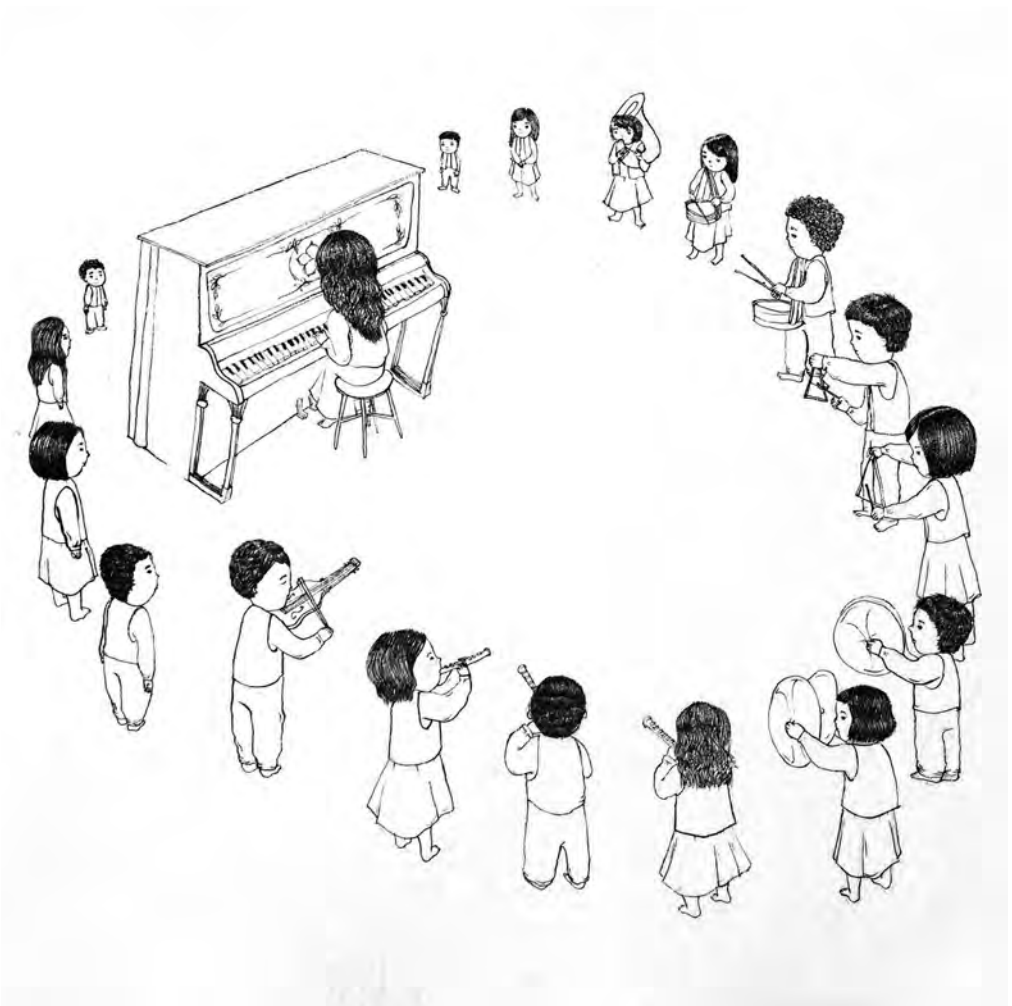
Now another book about parental power is causing an uproar: *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother*, by Amy Chua. In this book, Chua describes her child-rearing methods, which are – by contemporary standards – exceptionally tough. She made her two daughters put in long hours practising their musical instruments and studying math. She wouldn't let them engage in any of the activities that modern children consider fun. She refused to accept carelessly made birthday cards, or imperfectly performed piano pieces, or any school grade lower than an A. When one of her daughters disappointed her, Chua told her she was "garbage". Until they reached their teens, the girls were given no autonomy at all. They had to do exactly what their mother told them to do.

Remarkably, the girls apparently did do everything (or nearly everything) their mother told them to do. Even more remarkable, in light of modern theories of child development, is that they don't appear to have been damaged by their upbringing. There are no signs that they are lacking in self-esteem, or emotional fortitude, or the ability to get along with their peers. Here is a description of Chua's older daughter, written by one of her classmates:

> I went to high school with Sophia, and I can attest that, in addition to being

an intellectual and musical powerhouse, she is a wonderful, encouraging and extremely loyal friend. We worked together as lab partners one year, and Sophia was absolutely able to work as part of a group; she brought patience and humor into all our lab activities.

Parents do matter in some ways. As I said in *The Nurture Assumption*, parents can teach their children things at home. Playing a musical instrument was one of the examples I gave. Parents also have a great deal of influence on the way their children behave at home. But parents cannot shape their children's personalities or control the way they behave outside the home. If you allow for the effects of genetic heritage – a very important "if" –



children turn out about the same, in terms of personality and mental health, whether they were reared by tough parents or indulgent ones.

The evidence comes from a variety of sources. Consider, for example, the sweeping changes in child-rearing practices that occurred in the United States between 1930 and 1980. I was born in 1938, and back then nearly all parents were tough. They didn't worry about damaging their children's self-esteem: they worried about "spoiling" them. Praise, hugs, and declarations of love were given sparingly, if at all. Physical punishment was administered routinely for infractions of household rules. Fathers played a minor role in rearing their children; they served mainly as dispensers of punishment.

The cultural change in child-rearing practices and attitudes began in the 1940s. People born in the '60s and '70s experienced a very different sort of family life than their parents had. But these changes failed to have the effects that developmental psychologists would predict. Despite all the spankings we endured as children, the people of my generation are not more aggressive (or, for that matter, less aggressive) than the generations that came after us. Despite the lack of praise we received, we are not more deficient in self-esteem. Researchers who carried out two large-scale studies searching for generational differences in adult personality gave this summary of their results: 'Adults show the same distribution of personality traits regardless of the era in which they were raised'.

Other evidence comes from research using the techniques of behavioural genetics. Such studies consistently show that the home environment provided by parents has little or no effect on the children's adult personality or mental health. The reason that troubled parents tend to have troubled kids is that personality and psychopathology are partly genetic.

These findings from scientific studies have practical implications. They mean that you can choose your child-rearing style on the basis of what works best for you and your family today, rather than worrying about what effect it will have on your children tomorrow. Worrying less about your children's tomorrow gives you a better chance of enjoying them today.

Would you enjoy your children more if they were as tightly regulated as Amy Chua's? Probably not. But there is a vast amount of territory between Amy Chua-style parenting and the kind of parenting seen today in most American and European homes. Perhaps the sweet spot of parenting can be found somewhere in that space.

# Lake

*by Rebecca Watts*

Behind, engines are born and die
hurrying on their way.

Beyond, the lake.

Sometimes the sky is bewildered
and skitters all ways on the water
while minnows chase.

Sometimes it lays light down
meditative as marble
to reflect on its own clear face.

When the swan pulls into his arc of flight
wide-winged as though he'd skim cream from the water
the lake hasn't anything to lose

by letting the sun peek in
and rolls on its shoulder just a touch
like a labrador dreaming.

Call from the edge and the lake will come
and will keep assenting.

Behind, engines are born and die
hurrying on their way.

# Rebelliousness, Risk and Social Deviance: Educational Intervention and Public Policy

*by Scott Barry Kaufman*

Dream as if you'll live forever. Live as if you'll die today.
JAMES DEAN

I recently paid a visit to Madame Tussaud's wax museum in New York City. It was an eerie experience, as there were many moments when I simply could not tell at first sight which people were real and which were just wax figures. I was especially struck by James Dean's figure. He looked so alive and so cool. Behind his waxwork hangs a plaque on the wall with the following line said by the actor John Derek in the film *Knock On Any Door*: "Live fast, die young, and have a beautiful-looking corpse".

James Dean certainly lived the fast life. Unfortunately, it was *too* fast, as he left this world at the age of 24. His wax figure is how the world will always remember him; young, brooding and cool. As I stood in front of his figure, I wondered what he went through in his life, what his thoughts were like from one moment to the next, and how he reacted to things. Beautiful minds come in very different forms. Many of the greatest talents, like Dean, have lived the fast life and died young. And as researchers are beginning to understand, the fast life has a deep, evolutionary logic to it. Therefore, to really get into the mind of James Dean, you must really get into the mind of Darwin.

Included in the suite of traits and behaviours that promote the fast life

are those related to rebelliousness and risk-taking. Both of these variables are linked to a lack of self-control, both in thought and in action. But while slower life societies such as Western societies typically view the human capacity for self-control as the hallmark of evolution, in *most* of the harsh and unpredictable ecologies in which our ancestors evolved, a *lack* of self-control was evolutionarily adaptive. Therefore, in certain ecologies, risk was adaptive. But what *is* risk, anyway?

## Risk is Relative

When thinking about rebelliousness and risk, it is instructive to adopt the thinking of economists, behavioural ecologists, and modern evolutionary psychologists, who view risk as relative and take into account the context of the risk-taker. According to this approach, it matters *who* is deciding whether to take £5 now or wait a year to receive £10. If the person living under harsh and unpredictable conditions doesn't have much reason to think they will be able to live to collect that money, or if they need that money for immediate survival, it's actually "smarter" for them to take the £5, in comparison to the person who lives in a more stable environment where saving the money will have more of a long-term payoff. Considering the ecological validity of risk-taking behaviour, the evolutionary psychologists Figueredo and Jacobs point out that

> one cannot always assume the risk-taking behaviour to be maladaptive… Under some circumstances, discounting future losses in favour of more immediate gains is the more adaptive strategy; conversely, under other circumstances, discounting immediate gains in favour of future losses is the more adaptive strategy.

The standard social sciences model tends to place emphasis on the costs of risk while ignoring the expected *benefit* of risk-taking. As Figueredo and Jacobs note:

> By conflating variable payoffs and expected losses, social science becomes insensitive to potential motivations behind risk-taking. Standard social sciences thereby typically treat risk-taking as pathological and in need of preventive interventions.

In contrast, evolutionary theory predicts that for some individuals, under certain specific circumstances, it is adaptive to take risks. The benefit of this perspective is that it allows us to understand risk-taking behaviour dispassionately, enabling insight into both the negative consequences and positive incentives underlying different risk-taking behaviours.

People with a propensity for risk-taking tend to engage in risky behaviours across a wide variety of situations. But, in general, risk-taking tends to be higher in situations that Western cultures characterize as 'stressful'; for instance, where there is father-absence, a dysfunctional parental relationship, and low socioeconomic status, which tend to cluster together. Children growing up in such environments tend to display a variety of risk-taking behaviours that also cluster together, such as sexual precociousness, poor parenting behaviour, poor academic performance, suicide attempts, and violence.

This interconnectedness of context, behaviour and outcomes means that it is difficult to distinguish between risk-taking behaviours and the environmental conditions that are associated with them. This has some deep implications for social intervention, since changing a specific behavioural strategy within a cluster will likely be ineffective without also changing the contexts in which they are associated. While traditional social science theories have not offered much insight into the causal explanations for the existence of these clusters, the field of 'life history theory', grounded in evolutionary biology, offers pure and applied guidance for those who wish to address these problems systematically.

## Life History Theory, Self-Control and Social Deviance

According to life history theory, an individual's 'life history strategy' involves a coordinated set of behavioural tactics that are evolutionarily adaptive within particular life circumstances. Over the course of human evolution, natural and sexual selection acted to eliminate tactics that would interfere with other tactics in a particular suite. Those people who live the slower life tend to inhibit impulsive or risky behaviours that get in the way of longer-term goals; on the other hand, those who live the fast life tend to exude the general attitude of "being a rebel", as part of a short-term, risk-taking strategy.

Of course, just because something may be evolutionary adaptive does

not mean that it is necessarily "good" or "bad", "moral" or "immoral". Evolutionary adaptiveness strictly refers to the likelihood that a particular behaviour is conducive to survival and reproduction. Still, understanding the deep evolutionary logic of behaviours across the full spectrum of individual differences is important in making sense of widespread behaviours in society that have a clear pattern to them.

Since many behaviours that go against the rule norms of society tend to interfere with longer-term planning and goals, those living a slower life tend to minimize behaviours that are considered "socially deviant" in our society, such as delinquent behaviours, risk-taking behaviours, and impulsive behaviours. Some societal norms, however, such as attending school or long-term planning for the future, may conflict with the cluster of traits and behaviours that comprise a fast life strategy. Those living the fast life tend to have lower self-control and to engage in risky behaviours such as using drugs and alcohol, and to engage in risky sexual activity that can cause self-harm.

Those living the fast life also tend to have a cluster of traits and behaviours that, in the terms of behavioural endocrinology, is permissive of more criminal socially deviant behaviours such as theft and homocide. It is important to note that not all those who live the fast life engage in socially deviant behaviours; there are plenty of inner-city fast life youths with great levels of empathy and caring for others, and who have no desire to hurt others. The point is that the fast life mindset is conducive to social deviance, and is even statistically correlated with non-clinical levels of psychopathy.

For instance, the researchers Gladden, Sisco and Figueredo found that a fast life history strategy was related to an extensive inventory of self-reported sexually coercive behaviours, as well as psychopathy, machiavellianism and aggression. Other research has found that those with a fast life history strategy tended to score lower on a short-form measure of emotional intelligence. This is to be expected, since the fast life is associated with psychopathy, and psychopathy is associated with deficits in emotional and cognitive empathy.

In a series of more recent studies, Dr Jonason and his colleagues applied life history theory to what is known as the 'Dark Triad' – the combination of machiavellianism, subclinical narcissism, and subclinical psychopathy. Across multiple studies, they found that overall, men tended to have a faster life history strategy than women. It was argued that this is probably due to

the biological fact that men have a lower investment in offspring than do women. In a further paper, Jonason and Tost found evidence, across two studies, that psychopathy is associated with limited self-control, a tendency to discount future consequences, and high rates of attention deficit disorder. The researchers conclude that 'these systems are likely to leave the person with a fast life history strategy to feel as though they just cannot control themselves, although it is unlikely they want to'.

In sum, research does indeed show a statistical correlation between the fast life and an inclination toward psychopathy. Still, I must repeat that this does not mean the fast life is the same thing as social deviance. The cluster of traits and behaviours that comprise the fast life permits such risky behaviours, but they are not compulsory. Many living the fast life have a great deal of empathy but due to their lack of self-control tend to engage in risky behaviours that harm their own selves, even if they have no interest in harming others. All the research taken together suggests that those who are more likely to commit serious crimes than others are those who are simultaneously a) biologically predisposed to living the fast life, b) living under certain conditions (e.g. harsh and unpredictable environments) that make it more likely that the fast life genes will be activated, and c) predisposed to the traits that make up psychopathology (e.g. lack of empathy). Future research is needed that investigates the precise factors that turn an otherwise peaceful and law-abiding fast life strategist into a socially deviant person. The field of behavioural ecology is fast evolving and the findings have a lot of relevance for social interventions.

Now that we have looked at the evolutionary basis for these behaviours, what are the proximate cognitive mechanisms that facilitate the low levels of self-control found in fast life strategists?

## Executive Functions, Rebelliousness, and Risk

Research suggests that a set of brain areas located in the frontal lobes of humans support self-control processes. These 'executive functions' enable people to plan, inhibit, or delay responding. The extent to which these areas of the brain light up in an individual predicts whether that person is likely to follow the rule norms of society, or engage in a wide variety of risky behaviours. Correlations can also be found at the behavioural level of analysis. Various research studies have found that a cluster of socially

deviant behaviours, such as a lack of positive peer influence, antisocial behaviour, deficits in self-control, impulsivity, lack of future orientation, and risk-taking, relate to systematic deficits in performance-based measures of executive functioning.

Executive functioning areas of the brain allow for *rule governance*, which often takes the form of compliance with verbal if-then statements. Where do these statements come from? Typically, it's *other people who come up with these rules*. Therefore, executive functions are really good at adhering to others' rules.

Linking the ability for rule governance to executive functioning, Figueredo and Jacobs argue that the lower the level of executive functioning in a person, the more directly that person will respond to immediate adaptive problems, environmental conditions, and behavioural outcomes (e.g. fast life behaviours). In contrast, they argue that the higher the level of executive functioning in a person, the more that individual will respond to long-term adaptive problems, environmental conditions,

and behavioural outcomes (i.e. slower life behaviours). Either case can be adaptive depending on the context.

## Mutualistic and Antagonistic Strategies

According to Malamuth's 'Confluence Model', those living the slower life are more prone to approach sexual relationships harmoniously and they therefore adopt mutualistic sexual strategies. This is because convergent interests are more conducive to the long-term planning of slower life strategists. On the other hand, those living the fast life are predicted to be more prone to approach sexual relationships antagonistically.

In a fascinating extension of Malamuth's model, Figueredo and Jacobs argue that the mutualistic-antagonistic spectrum doesn't apply just to the sexual domain, but also to the *social* domain. They argue that those living the slower life are more prone to adopt a mutualistic social strategy toward others whereas those living the fast life will be more prone to adopt an antagonistic social strategy toward others.

Research does bear this out. Those living the slower life are indeed more likely to be securely attached, and engage in reciprocally altruistic relationships with family members and friends, as well as romantic partners and their offspring. Slower life strategists do prefer long-term and cooperative social and sexual relationships, which is indeed an adaptive preference in stable, predictable and controllable environments. The mutualistic social strategy adopted by slower life strategists is inherently less risky. Being open to following the rules set by others is simply less risky than being a "rebel".

On the other hand, a fast life history strategy, and the associated insecure attachment found in those with this strategy, is associated with an antagonistic social strategy that brings one in conflict with others but is also consistent with short-term gains. The deficits in behavioural and emotional self-regulation found in fast life strategists facilitate this conflict, causing potential harm to self and others. As Figueredo and Jacobs point out, the same conditions of environmental harshness and unpredictability that contribute to the evolution and development of the fast life also facilitate an antagonistic social strategy. As they astutely note, 'harm to others and potential harm to self are therefore intimately intertwined in multiple ways and at multiple levels that are difficult to disentangle in the real world'.

## Dangerous Minds

Fool, death ain't nothing but a heart beat away,
I'm living life do or die, what can I say?
I'm twenty-three now but will I ever live to see twenty-four,
The way things is going I don't know...
We've been spending most our lives
Living in a gangsta's paradise.

COOLIO

There is a lot of potential for life history strategy to be integrated with educational psychology, particularly when it comes to developing creativity. Life history theory gives us greater insight into the mechanisms by which students adapt to their environments, *inside and outside* of the classroom. Lots of students with extraordinary potential for making socially valuable contributions have their potential squandered because their energies are directed toward other concerns involving survival and reproduction.

Life history strategy is *not* directly related to IQ. While IQ test performance is related to tests of executive functioning, the processes evoked when taking an IQ test aren't exactly the same as the processes evoked on tests of executive functioning. Life history strategy is less about IQ and more tied to executive functioning and the self-control and emotional self-regulation skills that executive functioning affords. Therefore, fast life strategists are not "stupid". In fact, if you define intelligence as the ability to adapt to the environment (as many intelligence researchers define the term), then fast life strategists are, in certain environments, *very* intelligent.

Many fast life strategists are reprimanded in school for displaying social problems that are adaptive in their environment outside the classroom but may not be adaptive inside the classroom. Indeed, Robert J. Sternberg has long-argued that "practical intelligence" is a form of intelligence just as important as the type of analytical skills measured by IQ tests (see his book, *How Practical and Creative Intelligence Determine Success in Life*). The importance of looking at context in making sense of a wide range of intelligent behaviours has also been argued quite convincingly by Stephen Ceci, in *On Intelligence...More or Less: A Biological Treatise on Intellectual Development*.

While intelligence theorists rarely peer through an evolutionary lens (a

state of affairs I find unfortunate), I think looking at the entire suite of human strategies from an evolutionarily informed perspective offers potential for helping teachers better understand the evolutionary logic behind many of the traits and behaviours they see in their classrooms. Just as I stared non-judgmentally at James Dean and really tried to get into his head, I think teachers may get more out of their students by really getting into their students' heads and attempting to understand the evolutionary logic behind many of their classroom behaviours.

Such an understanding can potentially help students channel their strategies toward socially acceptable creative and productive pursuits. There's no need to throw out the baby with the bathwater; some fast life traits such as risk-taking, questioning of authority, and rebelliousness can be quite conducive to creativity. Don't we want to teach our students to question authority, and not blindly follow other people's rules? Unfortunately, displays of creativity and low executive functioning are not highly valued in most classrooms (see Jonah Lehrer's blog post *Classroom Creativity*, which summarizes recent articles in this regard). A recent paper called 'Cognition without control: When a little frontal lobe goes a long way', however, points to the various benefits, including creativity and language learning, of *deactivating* executive functions. At the end of the day, the key to dealing with life's many demands seems to be the ability to strategically activate or deactivate executive functions depending on the context. This skill is not taught in schools, but *why not*?

Thankfully, there's some exciting work being done looking at education from an evolutionarily-informed perspective. I highly recommend checking out Peter Gray's work on the topic (for examples, see *ADHD and School: The Problem of Assessing Normalcy in an Abnormal Environment* and *The "ADHD Personality": Its Cognitive, Biological, and Evolutionary Foundations*). While Gray doesn't explicitly tie ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) with life history strategy, I think there is good reason to link the two to each other, especially in light of Jonason and Tost's article that links ADHD and a lack of self-control to life history strategy.

While it certainly doesn't explain *everything*, I think there is a lot of potential for using life history strategy to inform educational structure and practices. There are a lot of students who may not be well-adapted to a structured classroom environment, but that does not mean that they can't harness their particular way of thinking and behaving in a way that is highly

innovative as well as socially and culturally valued. The life history framework also predicts that in order to have long-lasting changes on students living the fast life, you have to change their harsh and unpredictable contexts, as this is the most likely way their strategies will change from seeking short-term gains to seeing a purpose for longer-term planning.

## Social Class and Public Policy

> We don't have to view the poor as stupid, ignorant, damaged, or temperamentally different from anyone else. They are just human beings, doing as human beings do, which is to make the best of the hand they are dealt, and we can build principled accounts of why they do so in the way that they do.
>
> DANIEL NETTLE

I recently saw *District 9* and loved it. The movie starts from the perspective of the humans, who try to evict and isolate what appear to be angry, mindless aliens. Then we see the world through the eyes of the aliens and we start to build up empathy for what they're going through and how they are treated. Suddenly, their aggression makes a bit more sense, and their behaviours seem more logical.

As I was watching the movie, I noticed some parallels with the behavioural ecology approach. The main tenet of behavioural ecology is that all animals exhibit the potential for behavioural flexibility, and use this flexibility to do the best they can in terms of survival and reproductive success given the context in which they find themselves.

Behavioural ecology has proven quite useful in explaining human behaviour. Humans behave very differently depending on their socioeconomic status. To make sense of why people behave the way they do, it's important to take into account factors that differ widely from one environment to the next. One major factor associated with socioeconomic status is the rate of mortality present in the environment. Mortality rates differ quite a bit from one neighbourhood to the next, and have a dramatic impact on people's life expectancy.

As one demonstration of this, Madhavi Bajekal, head of the UK government's Morbidity and Healthcare team, looked at all of the electoral wards in Britain and assessed the relationship between the length of time

expected to be alive and healthy and the level of social deprivation. He found that the difference in life expectancy between the most deprived areas of Britain and the least is as much as two decades (50 vs. 70)! Such differences in life expectancy can have dramatic effects on people's psychology and behaviour. Daniel Nettle looked at 8,660 families in Britain and found that in the most deprived neighbourhoods, the maternal age at first birth is younger, birthweights are lower, and breastfeeding duration is shorter than in the most affluent neighbourhoods. In the poorest areas women have babies around the age of 20, compared to the age of 30 in the richest areas. There is also

indirect evidence that reproductive rates are higher in the poorest areas. In other words, when people expect to die young, they live fast, adopting a fast life history strategy.

This pattern is not just found in Britain. Across a set of small-scale subsistence societies, Robert Walker and his colleagues found that for every 10 per cent decline in the infant survival rate, there is a year decrease in mother's age at first birth, and Bobbi Low and her colleagues found that across the world, the shorter the life expectancy, the earlier women reproduced. This pattern holds not just among humans but across a large number of mammalian species. Both within humans and across species, you tend to find that the higher the mortality, the earlier the onset of sexual reproduction in females and the higher the mating effort and male-male competition.

Looking through a behavioural ecology lens, we can make sense of these behaviours. When mortality is low, it would be evolutionarily adaptive for a female to have a small number of offspring and invest in each one. But in ecologies where mortality is high, that same strategy would leave the female with a high probability of having no offspring at all surviving to adulthood. To reiterate, the term adaptive as used here does not necessarily mean the same thing as socially desirable. Adaptive strictly refers to the likelihood that certain (conscious or unconscious) behaviours maximize survival and reproductive success. Still, the evolutionary approach allows us to understand widespread behavioural patterns that might seem random.

In general, the behavioural ecology approach views low socioeconomic behaviours as adaptive within harsh and unpredictable environments. This approach can explain seeming puzzles such as why those living in such environments, who have the most need to take care of themselves, are the least likely to do so. Some of the evolutionary predictions made by behavioural ecologies even go against common intuition. For instance, one might think that low birthweight or early life stress would cause females' reproductive development to slow down, but instead these factors actually speed up women's sexual development.

While mortality is a major determinant of the harshness of an environment, there are different types of mortality. Behavioural ecologists differentiate between extrinsic and intrinsic mortality. *Extrinsic* forms of mortality, such as the level of pollution in the air, are relatively unaffected by people's behaviour. *Intrinsic* mortality, on the other hand, is affected by people's decisions, such as ignoring medical advice or choosing foods

with poor nutrition. People can make a choice to reduce intrinsic mortality by trying to take care of themselves, but making that choice is a form of investment that takes up time and energy, an investment some people living in harsh environments may not view as worth it. Indeed, as the rate of extrinsic mortality goes up, the return on the investment of taking care of one's health does go down. As Nettle notes: 'Who would spend money on regularly servicing a car in an environment where most cars were stolen each year anyway?'

Still, I remain optimistic that we can use our understanding of the deep evolutionary logic of these fast life behaviours to influence public policy and have a real affect on the wellbeing of those living in the harshest of environments. Certainly, epidemiologists have done a remarkable job describing the extent to which distinct behaviours such as sexual behaviour, drug use and violence are related to the total rate of mortality in a society. A major limitation of their approach, though, is that they tend to treat these behaviours as unrelated. The evolutionary perspective suggests instead that these behaviours cluster together in non-random ways for evolutionarily adaptive reasons.

Neither biology nor environmental circumstances are destiny. But that does not mean change is going to be easy. Many factors at many different levels play a crucial role in shaping the fast life. A person's individual traits, family, neighbourhood, peers, and the norms of conduct of that society each play crucial roles. To make large-scale changes you can't just change one particular trait, behaviour, or aspect of the environment. Large-scale changes will require large-scale interventions that address many aspects of the system at once. A lot needs to happen in the harshest of environments to convince people and their genes that investing in their health will have a long-term payoff. As Nettle notes:

> We should not be surprised that social gradients in diet, breast-feeding or teenage pregnancy have failed to diminish, since the underlying inequality of our society has not diminished either... Actually reducing poverty in the most deprived areas is far more likely to be influential than superficial education or awareness-raising schemes.

Take basketball, for instance. Many social interventionists think that adding basketball courts in low socioeconomic neighbourhoods will

help redirect aggressive energies into friendly neighbourhood games. The thinking is that by diverting such energies away from gang-related violence to cooperative play, gang violence will dissipate. This approach has failed. Increasing the basketball uptake of inner city youths has had no observable effect on the rate of violent crime. Changing more than just one aspect of the interconnected web of life history factors is required.

As another example, the UK government attempted to reduce the teenage pregnancy rate by educating young people about reproduction and contraception. These programs have proven to be ineffective. From an evolutionary perspective, ignorance is not the issue. In fact, it is ignorant for educators to think ignorance is the issue! Younger women in low socioeconomic status areas tend to reproduce at younger ages due to the circumstances of their environment. They are actually taking an informed risk based on their life expectancy. As social scientist Lisa Arai put it: 'policymakers find it hard to believe that young women, often in the least auspicious circumstances, might actually want to be mothers'.

Significant changes are possible though. For example, the royalties that came from building a casino in a poor US neighbourhood led to an unexpected reduction in psychopathology and antisocial behaviours. Additionally, there was a considerable decline in teenage birth rates in the United States in the 90s, particularly among African Americans, which was probably due to a better economy and increase in employment opportunities for black women during this time. As *The New Scientist* reports, however, teenage birth rates among African Americans are rising again, most likely due to the relatively recent economic decline.

There is a lot of potential for the behavioural ecology perspective to inform public policy, but I agree with Nettle that there is a great need for social scientists and evolutionary theorists to unite in a common cause and go beyond false misconceptions about what it really means for something to have an evolutionary basis: 'evolved' is not the opposite of 'learned', and 'evolutionary causes' are not the opposite of 'social causes'. As Nettle eloquently notes:

> Evolutionary thinking in the human sciences is nothing more or less than the holistic, integrative understanding that we, like other animals, respond to our social and developmental environment in non-arbitrary ways.

# A Movement for Happiness and Empathy

*by Richard Layard*

Competition is lonely. It is good to have it between organisations. But within organisations it may or may not increase productivity, but it does not increase happiness. To extol it is to make a fundamental misjudgement about human nature.

For we are born with a strongly social side to our nature (a homo empathicus), as well as a profoundly selfish side. By the age of two many children will run and comfort another child who is hurt. We are wired up for fellow feeling – when subjects in an experiment watch others put their hands in icy water, their own temperature falls.

We obtain pleasure from cooperation. When subjects in an experiment play the game of Prisoner's Dilemma, they can either cooperate or not with the other players. If they choose to cooperate, their brains light up in the standard areas that light up after other rewarding experiences. Immanuel Kant was simply wrong in saying that there can be no inner reward from doing the right thing. But the reward only results if the motivation was to do good – you do not get the reward if your motivation was the reward.

So here is my picture of the good society. It is one where, as the Anglo-Saxon Enlightenment believed, there is the most happiness and the least misery. And we get there because every individual believes just that, and acts to promote it. Young people grow up aspiring to produce the most happiness they can in the world. And, because they do, others benefit and at the same time they themselves get the internal rewards from doing good. This is the empathic civilisation.

In such a society people feel that others are on their side – rather

than being a source of difficulty. How different from the society we have constructed in the last half century where individuals are increasingly in competition with each other. Forty years ago in the US and Britain some 60 per cent of individuals believed that "most other people can be trusted". Now it is nearer 30 per cent. This is not surprising when we have so idolised personal success. The struggle for success is of course a zero-sum game – you cannot increase the total amount of success since it is a relative concept. Instead we want a society where our main effort goes into positive-sum activities. These frequently involve cooperation and never involve deliberate effort to harm others.

But can we reverse the tide of history? I am sure we can. Cultural trends are not linear. There is already considerable disillusion with a society based mainly on the pursuit of wealth. As the surveys show, happiness has not grown in the last half century in Britain or the US despite unparalleled growth in living standards. People increasingly realise that if happiness is to be increased it must be through an improvement in human relationships – a growth of empathy. And this conviction is strengthened by the deplorable example of the finance industry, where the cultivation of selfishness almost brought down the world economy.

Where can we start in the building of empathy? Parents are vital but, if we are talking of a change in culture, the key instruments are the schools. Some are good at empathy, but many are not. There are many good examples, and all begin with an agreed set of values between teachers, students and parents – based above all on mutual respect and responsibility. The school ethos is critical, as well as good evidence-based programmes in life skills. When the values of society go astray, it is generally the young who initiate change. But all age groups can contribute.

To promote a change in culture a group of people in Britain and the US have founded Action for Happiness (www.actionforhappiness.org), a movement which promotes the ideas I have been discussing – as principles for how individuals should lead their own lives, and as guides for new priorities in social policy and workplace practice. We really could produce a happier and more harmonious society if we agreed that that was our top priority. Let's go for it.

# Newspeak and the Meaning of Happiness

*by Ben Irvine*

I'm a recovered philosopher. There, I said it. When I was at the height of my mind-body problemania I never really saw myself as a regular citizen, as I do now. Occasionally I'd encounter untenured philosophers in pubs; loosened by a beer, their capacity for logical introspection would be swinging outwards with verbal abandon, untied like hair, as they recounted some auspicious ism or other. I'd look at them and wonder, with a shade of patronizing sympathy: what do you do with yourself these days? They seemed like washed-up burlesque dancers, eager to strut a few philosophical moves for pride, and for old times' sake, before finding their true selves in the bottom of a glass and a morning after – usually in an office. I never thought it would happen to me.

Then I lost my philosophical mojo, and every day was a morning after. But there are mornings and there are mornings. Some mornings you drag yourself like a sack of grey dust into the day's cement mixer. Other mornings you wake to a sense of opportunity: a dawning. You see, it turns out that my mojo – by which I mean my desire to be creative in order to dissipate a sense of nervous energy – was undiminished. It was just that my outlook had metamorphosed – from closed deliberation to open purpose. What had dawned was a simple fact: there are more productive ways of channelling *angst* than philosophizing – that glorious but ultimately futile escape-dance from the human condition. I finally bit the bullet. The co-existence of a mind and a body isn't a problem – it's a human! One whose constituents can be put to better use.

It's this ability to see beyond philosophy's familiar palette of problems

that distinguishes the recovered philosopher from the untenured one. So what's a recovered philosopher to *do*? One option is to get involved in the field of happiness research, as expounded seminally in Richard Layard's book *Happiness: Lessons from a New Science*. The idea behind happiness research is to analyze the human condition with a view to discerning ways of increasing individual and collective wellbeing. Put like that, its agenda may sound similar to a lot of traditional academic disciplines – economics, psychology, sociology, anthropology, history, even philosophy. But happiness research is more than the sum of these disciplinary parts. It's their panorama; one which synchronizes their findings in a way that the individual fields can't.

Another recommendation for happiness research is that it is focused on improving human wellbeing, in a way that each of its constituent fields isn't always. For instance, economists have shown a lack of urgency in coming up with an alternative economic system to the one which is presently careering us towards eco-geddon; psychologists, as scientists, are rightly more concerned with describing, rather than prescribing, human conduct; while many sociologists, anthropologists and even historians seem to be excessively preoccupied with a postmodern lament (or is it a dithyramb?) about failed objectivity – one which, by bordering on nihilism, forswears any intellectual effort to better the human situation. Don't get me started.

Too late. Because the third recommendation for happiness research is precisely its devout sense of realism in the face of the postmodern unrealism that's rife in the humanities. In particular, happiness research has an appropriate regard for the evolutionary origins of the human species. Whether we like it or not, they can tell us a lot about the limits of, and the means of maximizing, human happiness.

But what about philosophy? Weren't the ancient Greek thinkers proponents of the 'good life', one of contentment – eudaemonia, ataraxia, stoicism and the like – as expounded through their words and actions? Yes, but you don't get much of that from philosophers anymore. For thousands of years, they've mainly footnoted Plato's preoccupation with transcending the mind and the world (an ambition which he oddly considered a prerequisite to enjoying the ones we've got). Worse still, philosophers have often seemed fishily preoccupied with transcending their *social* responsibilities: an elite few sitting round a table chatting hypochondriacally about whether or not tables exist, while everyone else toils among the elements. With a few

exceptions, notably the campaigns of Jean Paul Sartre and Bertrand Russell, philosophy's commitment to expounding the good life has degenerated into a somewhat indulgently good life for philosophers.

These considerations brought me to a resolution: to try to avoid hypocrisy. Thus I began foraying into happiness research. But, as sod's law would have it, I soon stumbled on an argument which threatened to make a hypocritical sod out of me after all.

It hit me midway through John Naish's fascinating book *Enough: Breaking Free from the World of Excess*. Naish, a leading environmental campaigner, describes a sickness at the heart of modern life. Well-documented by happiness researchers – and famously dubbed 'affluenza' by Oliver James – its symptoms include status-racing, acquisitiveness, over-competitiveness, information-overload, obesity and overwork. Naish offers an apposite cure for this epidemic of excess: 'enoughism'. It's the personal ethos of saying "enough" to society's surfeits: too much information, food, material goods, consumer choice and, ultimately, environmental depredation; in a nutshell, too much fixating upon a certain kind of economic growth. Enoughism offers an alternative lifestyle – one of sustainability, self-control and compassion. So far so good, until Naish lines up one particular target for enoughism: happiness itself.

Enough happiness? That can't be right. I mean, by definition it can't be right. As Thomas Jefferson pointed out in the Declaration of Independence, it's *self-evident* that 'the pursuit of happiness' is one of the fundamental human rights. Layard takes it to be so – averring that happiness 'just obviously does matter' – and I agree. To put it bluntly, if someone told me that from now on all my efforts in life would fail to make me or anyone else happy, I think I'd join Arthur Schopenhauer in declaring 'the game's not worth the candle', thank you very much.

But there's the rub. Naish argues that all our efforts to be happy are failing to make us happy. They're even making us miserable and neurotic. 'We become hypervigilant for happiness and turn into emotional hypochondriacs when it doesn't happen', as Naish puts it; and this demonstrates 'the ultimate futility of fulfillment seeking'. His counsel is that people should instead embrace the 'satisfaction' and 'contentment' offered by enoughism, thus 'modestly enjoying the day rather than worrying if they're on the path to perfection'.

There's nothing like a bit of cognitive dissonance to get the intellectual

ball rolling. Happiness research had seemed like a worthwhile pursuit, yet if Naish is right it's worse than useless. Worse still, its proponents would be hard to distinguish from those philosophers who offer us false promises of a good life while living an indulgent one of their own – such is the 'charlatanry… quackery, fraud and snake-oil salesmanship that has grown up around the happiness movement', so Naish warns us. Unless he's wrong, it seems that something's got to give: my philosophical recovery or my pursuit of happiness. And I don't want to give up either.

Besides, it's hard to resist the thrill of the chase. As members of the species Naish calls 'homo expectens', humans evolved to 'strive ever onwards', 'chasing another ever-more' in an ancestral environment in which resources were scarce. But now we live in a time of plenty, it's time to calm down, says Naish. Our runaway desirousness has become an intoxicant to which his book is the intended antidote, teaching us to settle for what we've got rather than anachronistically twisting and twisting until the environment busts. Un-expectant humans will choose to stick – and thereby stick around on the planet. Then presumably they'll live on contentedly like Naish: enjoying sparse but nutritious meals, holidaying in Britain, and writing books about their lifestyle.

The problem is, it's not clear that un-expectant humans *could* achieve this lifestyle (or even fulfill their basic material needs, as people in the developed world have generally been doing for the last century or so). At the risk of sounding trite, you've got to expectantly make the necessary preparations to enjoy any sort of meal; you've got to expectantly browse a brochure or peruse a map to choose a holiday destination (even if it is Bognor Regis); and you've got to expectantly commit your fingers to the keyboard to write a book (to get to what Sartre called 'the other side of the possibility of not writing it'). Each of these forms of satisfaction derives from an original expectation. Enough is, by definition, a satisfactorily fulfilled expectation.

Another way of putting this is to say that contentedness, satisfaction and modestly enjoying the day are all achievements that involve some kind of sustained *pursuit*. It's a pursuit with a composite meaning: not just an effort to realize expectations, but a way of living that's defined by circumscribed expectations; a pursuit in the sense of a 'hobby', such as pigeon-fancying, gardening or fell-walking. You could call it the pursuit of happiness – if you were so inclined.

Naish isn't. But that's surprising, because there's so much overlap

between enoughism and the kind of happiness that Lord Layard and his fellow researchers are encouraging us to pursue. Both require us to cultivate life's core pleasures, such as family and marital relationships, job satisfaction, health, financial orderliness, personal autonomy, friendly communities and moral values. And both require us to shun a modern way of living that jeopardizes these pleasures.

Of course, what separates Naish from the happiness researchers is his insistence that our dysfunctional modern way of living is actually *caused* by 'happiness-chasing'. So what allegedly *is* this? It's about 'status-hunger'; 'chasing another ever-more, on top of the fantastic career, the perfect possessions, the ideal home, the flawless partner, the trophy holidays and all the other latest lifestyle options'. Its goal is 'esteem-raising', 'affirmation', 'self-actualisation', 'more-me'. It's undertaken via 'communing with spirit-gurus and power animals', incanting 'I Love Me' mantras, and reading books like *Think and Grow Rich*. It's orchestrated by a 'happiness industry'; a 'hard-sell happiness drive', a 'want-now consumerism' that tells us 'you can have everything you want', including 'liposuction', 'plastic surgery', and even 'the perfect baby' (soon after which 'rival parents', as Asda charmingly calls them, can compete to buy more expensive-looking nativity costumes). And we're cajoled into stressfully overworking for all this by celebrities who 'have been airbrushed to infinity, lead vacuous lives parading before phalanxes of clicking paparazzi and only crave publicity because their souls are gnawed raw by hyperneurotic insecurity': our new role-models.

Can all this really be what happiness *means*? This is a philosophical question, but one whose answer has an uncharacteristically tangible significance (perfect for a recovered philosopher). For only if we answer it correctly can we hope to achieve the common result sought by Naish and the happiness researchers. So who is to be master of the meaning of happiness?

In George Orwell's famous novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, a totalitarian government run by 'the Party' is attempting to replace language as we know it with one that's designed to render political dissent impossible. Called 'newspeak', the replacement contains only simple nouns, verbs and inflections, and subsumes all politically inconvenient 'oldspeak' concepts under the prohibitive and undifferentiated notion of 'thoughtcrime', thus eradicating them from history. Some heretical-sounding concepts survive in newspeak, but only, as the narrator explains, 'with their undesirable meanings purged out of them'. For instance, the word 'free' is retained 'for the sake of

convenience' but it can only be used in such statements as 'this field is free from weeds', not with 'its old sense of "politically free" or "intellectually free", since political and intellectual freedom no longer exist… even as concepts'. Other heretical concepts are retained but in a form where they express 'the exact opposite of what they appeared to mean': the 'Ministry of Love' is for torturing dissenters; the 'Ministry of Peace' is for administering wars; and 'joycamps' are for forced labourers.

Notice how these last usages involve the qualification 'appeared to mean'. The most insidious thing about this particular kind of newspeak is that its exemplar concepts retain a residue of the psychology of their old versions, even while thoroughly perverting and appropriating their meanings. What the Party gains from this – as opposed to just coining new concepts – is that a positive and powerful connotation may carry over from an oldspeak concept into its newspeak incarnation. The paradigm example of this comes in the novel's denouement, as the protagonist Winston is tortured into submission. At last he learns to 'love' the Party, except that 'love' doesn't *mean* what it previously *appeared* to, because its psychological connotations – as the most powerful and emotional of bonds, giving meaning to Winston's life – are no longer trained on his human loved-ones but on the Party's oppressive machinery. In the spirit of Orwell, I'll refer to these instances as 'conspeak', where 'con' implies a dastardly confidence trick as well as a contradiction.

It's hard not to shudder at Orwell's dystopia. It's even harder not to shudder at a modern world where 'doublespeak' is rampant in politics, business and the media (especially where military matters are concerned). Orwell didn't use the term, but it's a charge familiarly levelled at phrases like 'aerial ordnance' (bombs and missiles), 'downsizing' (cutting jobs), 'riots' (protests) and 'surgical strikes' (military attacks). Among such euphemisms there's a scale of duplicity: from mild semantic evasion to the full perversity of conspeak. Even some of our most sacred concepts have been assailed by conspeak, with 'peacekeeping forces' waging wars, and mobile phone companies offering us 'freedom of speech' bound by an 18-month contract.

But there's one modern instance of conspeak that surpasses all others. Some might say it's so powerful it sustains them all. Its scale is industrial, international, political and personal – it's *All-Consuming*, as Neal Lawson's anti-shopping polemic hints. It's a brazenly perverse appellation for a conspiracy of greediness, status-chasing, amorality and narcissism - in a word, indulgence. It involves an Orwellian embrace

between an oppressor and an amorous oppressee, into which society has locked itself: one in which jaded big business continually serves up 'prole-feed' ('Happy Meals', no less) to a ravenously grateful public. "More Coke, more Snickers!" they toothlessly beg in Bill Hicks' parody. Roll up, roll up. It's the pursuit of happiness.

Except it's not. The 'Pursuit of *Happyness*' would be more fitting. The name comes from the Hollywood film whose protagonist escapes a hollow life of penurious struggle by 'beating' nineteen other candidates to a no-less vacuous stockbroker internship. Out of the joycamp and onto the high-wire: the film neglects to mention that it's a life of stressful, precarious, unrelenting status-racing either way. (As the old adage goes: the trouble with the rat race is, even if you win it you're still a rat). Modern society's pursuit of happyness is one that few can win, for a prize that even fewer want when they get it.

So who *is* to be master of the meaning of happiness? Newspeak or oldspeak? Happyness or happiness? The pursuit of diamond-encrusted mobile phones, 7-star hotels and cosmetic genitoplasty, or the old-fashioned pursuit of life's core pleasures like family and marital relationships, job satisfaction, health, financial orderliness, personal autonomy, friendly communities and moral values?

Naish says neither. By surrendering the meaning of happiness to newspeak he leaves himself with no alternative but to reject oldspeak happiness along with it. There's a fatalism to this result, all-too discernible in his writing. 'We all need to feel better about ourselves', he scoffs: 'it sounds like another of Lord Layard's "self-evidently" good things'. Sounds like, but isn't. Because that's how conspeak works. The narcissistic pursuit of 'status' and 'more-me' sounds like the pursuit of happiness only because the happyness industry has told us they're equivalent. Thus does Naish's superb polemic against indulgence begin to segueway into the trap of conspeak. 'More-me', by his own hand, engulfs happiness, as in 'more-happy-me'; and happiness becomes the 'H-word' – a vulgar word. The baby is placed into dirty bathwater: and then thrown out with it.

Worse, Naish's argument has the ultimate (and unlikely) consequence of making him sound like a social Darwinist. The problem is of his own making. Just like the happiness researchers from whom he wishes to distance himself, his rejection of the modern pursuit of happyness is based on the empirical fact that the enterprise isn't actually making us happy. But whereas

happiness researchers are free to invoke an alternative arbiter of happiness (based on the same kind of 'bellyfeel' that tells us Winston doesn't really *love* the Party), Naish, by his own standards, is not. Like a religionist who has yoked his morality so strongly to a sacred text that he has no external measure by which to filter out any of its more perverse injunctions, Naish has no external measure of happiness by which to reject the false promises of happyness. He's left with a single, draconian option. The pursuit of happiness, he concludes, is inherently pointless, because as a species we're doomed to unhappiness: 'if we look at our evolutionary wiring, we have to conclude that we are not designed to have happiness as our natural default state. When you come down to the dull facts, happiness is an evolutionary adaptation that exists to make us engage in certain behaviours at certain times when they might optimize our chances of surviving and reproducing'.

Happiness is thus stripped of all its aspirational qualities, and becomes instead like a brief interlude of lightness that eases the unfolding of a Shakespearian tragedy. The baby, apparently, *is* the bathwater. If anyone is depressed by Naish's suggestion that unhappiness is inevitable – let alone its implication that the whole idea of 'lifestyle change', upon which his book is premised, is futile – at least he attempts to console us: 'trying to deny our deeply-wired nature, or to displace the aspects that we don't like is, in the words of the old Zen joke, like a naked man trying to tear off his shirt'. In case the joke doesn't work (it didn't for me: I don't get it) Naish finally reassures us that unhappiness has its virtues: it 'keeps your head down when it's in danger of getting whacked by someone more alpha'. How encouraging.

There's a deep issue here for environmentalism. Naish confesses that his enoughist rejection of happiness makes him feel like a 'miserable old git'. And he acknowledges that 'pooping the entire western cultural party' (should that be the Party?) typically gets received unfavourably, as 'taboo'. No wonder it does! No wonder environmentalists end up feeling left in the cold. No wonder 'the unease we feel about the loss of social values and the way we are drawn into the pursuit of material gain is often experienced as if it were a purely private ambivalence which cuts us off from others' – as bemoaned by Wilkinson and Pickett in *The Spirit Level*. In the absence of a sociable alternative, many of us feel like Christopher McCandless, the American graduate who abandoned his home, gave all his money to charity and torched his car, before walking away from the pursuit of happyness and into the Alaskan wilderness.

Naish seems willing, if not overjoyed, to accept his predicament. 'If… the best that results from individually practicing enoughism is that some of us get to lead much more satisfactory personal lives… then so be it', he opines. He's pessimistic about the prospects for a happiness that everyone can enjoy, because 'it's not just "more happy me" that we're after: it's "more happy me than happy you"' – 'and this gets us into another unwinnable arms race'; one, that is, in which everyone ends up unhappy. But notice how again he inserts 'happy' into 'more me' – as in 'more happy me'. The baby goes in, the bathwater goes out: happiness goes down the plughole with happyness. Thankfully, it's not too late for Naish – or for society generally – to recognize a true happiness that's sociable in its etiology. Unfortunately, it was too late for McCandless, who scrawled in his diary just days before starving to death: 'happiness only real when shared'.

What is fundamentally at stake in the dispute over the meaning of happiness is a choice between what Wilkinson and Pickett describe as 'two opposite ways in which human beings can come together'. In their words: 'at one extreme, dominance hierarchies are about self-advancement and status competition. Individuals have to be self-reliant and other people are encountered mainly as rivals for food and mates. At the other extreme is mutual interdependence and co-operation, in which each person's security depends on the quality of their relationships with others, and a sense of self-worth comes less from status than from the contribution made to the well-being of others. Rather than the overt pursuit of material self-interest, affiliative strategies depend on mutuality, reciprocity and the capacity for empathy and emotional bonding'. Happyness or happiness.

In other words, deciding on the real meaning of happiness involves making a choice between two kinds of self-worth. By 'self-worth' is meant not the 'self-advancement' sought in the pursuit of happyness; rather it's the positive psychological connotation that's common to the meanings of happiness *and* happyness; the residue that's carried over by conspeak from one to the other, namely, a person's basic sense that their existence is worthwhile. Thus, the self-worth yielded by the pursuit of happiness 'comes less from status than the contribution made to the well-being of others', in Wilkinson and Pickett's phrase. Of course, this constitutes the only kind of happiness that's attainable, but what is most interesting is its method. Rather than trying to achieve self-worth by directly focusing our efforts on our own sense of status, as in the pursuit of happyness, the pursuit of

happiness enables us to achieve self-worth as a *by-product* of increasing others' happiness. The pursuit of happiness is somewhat paradoxical.

But the paradox needn't get us scrabbling for our thinking caps; for, central to it, and thus to happiness, is the mundane notion of *responsibility*. After all, the extent to which one acts with responsibility equates to both the extent of one's positive contribution to society and the extent of one's self-worth. Happiness comes to those who act with responsibility. This doesn't mean, of course, that the self-sacrifice one makes to one's society to achieve happiness is in itself a *social* sacrifice – a loss of esteem in others' eyes; on the contrary, the esteem in which one is held by others *increases in proportion* to the self-worth one achieves through pursuing happiness, precisely due to the positive contribution the pursuit makes to others' lives. In a nutshell: getting happy by co-operating with other people makes them respect you more.

Happiness as responsibility. It's an appropriately moral equation. For happiness was always supposed to offer us a good life. On this account, the good life is one that brings happiness both to the individual that's pursuing it and to the community that benefits from the pursuit. This, I think, offers some insight into the idea of happiness being the 'inalienable right' of 'all men', as defined by Thomas Jefferson. 'All' implies both an aggregation (of individual men) and a totality (as the community of men); and the 'right' of all men, as such, is to be able to become happy both through making a contribution to a community of which they are an individual part, and through belonging to a community which is composed of other men whose contributions as a totality make the community a happier one.

Happiness as responsibility. It's a navigable ridge that spans two inhospitable valleys – entitlement to the left, and self-advancement to the right – into which so much of modern social life has fallen, both functionally and ideologically. It's a crucial pathway in these amoral and divided political times. And with its mundane, practical acceptance of paradox, it's a pretty good motto for a recovered philosopher.

# Criticisms of the Concept of Depression

*by Neel Burton*

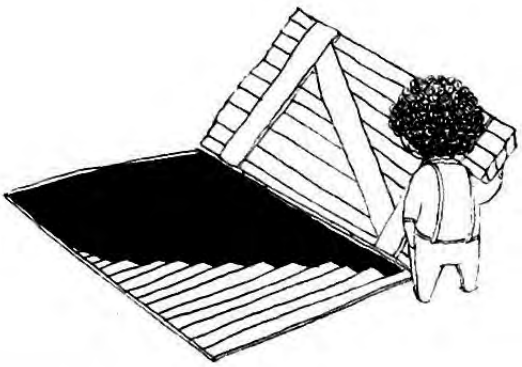
Happiness is good for the body, but it is grief which develops the strengths of the mind.

MARCEL PROUST

This crayon drawing by a hospital in-patient with severe depression alludes to her temporary withdrawal from mainstream society. The months that she spent in hospital gave her the time and the solitude to think over her life, and the motivation to make difficult but necessary changes to it. She went on to make a full recovery.

**Depression around the World**

There are important geographical variations in the prevalence of depression, and these can in large part be accounted for by socio-cultural factors. In traditional societies, human distress is



more likely to be seen as an indicator of the need to address important life problems, rather than as a mental disorder requiring professional treatment. For this reason, the diagnosis of depression is correspondingly less common. Some linguistic communities do not have a word or even a concept for 'depression', and many people from traditional societies with what may be construed as depression present with physical complaints such as headache or chest pain rather than with psychological complaints. Punjabi women who have recently immigrated to the UK and given birth find it baffling that a health visitor should pop round to ask them if they are depressed. Not only had they never considered the possibility that giving birth could be anything other than a joyous event, but they do not even have a word with which to translate the concept of 'depression' into Punjabi!

In modern societies such as the UK and the US, people talk about depression more readily and more openly. As a result, they are more likely

to interpret their distress in terms of depression, and less likely to fear being stigmatised if they seek out a diagnosis of the illness. At the same time, groups with vested interests such as pharmaceutical companies and mental health experts promote the notion of saccharine happiness as a natural, default state, and of human distress as a mental disorder. The concept of depression as a mental disorder may be useful for the more severe and intractable cases treated by hospital psychiatrists, but probably not for the majority of cases, which, for the most part, are mild and short-lived, and easily interpreted in terms of life circumstances, human nature, or the human condition.

Another (non-mutually exclusive) explanation for the important geographical variations in the prevalence of depression may lie in the nature of modern societies, which have become increasingly individualistic and divorced from traditional values. For many people living in our society, life can seem both suffocating and far removed, lonely even (especially, perhaps) amongst the multitudes, and not only meaningless but absurd. By encoding their distress in terms of mental disorder, our society may be subtly implying that the problem lies not with itself, but with them. However, thinking of the milder forms of depression in terms of an illness can be counterproductive, as it can prevent people from identifying and addressing the important life problems that are at the root of their distress.

## Problems with Diagnosis

All this is not to say that the concept of depression as a mental disorder is bogus, but only that the diagnosis of depression may have been over-extended to include far more than just depression the mental disorder. If, like the majority of medical conditions, depression could be defined and diagnosed according to its aetiology or pathology, such a state of affairs could not have arisen. Unfortunately, depression cannot as yet be defined according to its aetiology or pathology, but only according to its clinical manifestations and symptoms. For this reason, a doctor cannot base a diagnosis of depression on any objective criterion such as a blood test or a brain scan, but only on his subjective interpretation of the nature and severity of the patient's symptoms. If some of these symptoms appear to tally with the diagnostic criteria for depression, then the doctor is able to justify making a diagnosis of depression.

One important problem here is that the definition of 'depression' is

circular: the concept of depression is defined according to the symptoms of depression, which are in turn defined according to the concept of depression. Thus, it is impossible to be certain that the concept of depression maps onto any distinct disease entity, particularly since a diagnosis of depression can apply to anything from mild depression to depressive psychosis and depressive stupor, and overlap with several other categories of mental disorder including dysthymia, adjustment disorders, and anxiety disorders. Indeed, one of the consequences of the 'menu of symptoms' approach to diagnosing depression is that two people with absolutely no symptoms in common can both end up with the same diagnosis of depression. For this reason especially, the concept of depression has been charged with being little more than a socially constructed dustbin for all manner of human suffering.

## An Adaptive Role?

Every person inherits a certain complement of genes that make her more or less vulnerable to developing depression during her lifetime. A person suffers from depression if the amount of stress that she comes under is greater than the amount of stress that she can tolerate, given her vulnerability to developing depression. Genes for potentially debilitating disorders such as depression usually pass out of a population over time because affected people have, on average, fewer children than non-affected people. The fact that this has not happened for depression suggests that the responsible genes are being maintained despite their potentially debilitating effects on a significant proportion of the population, and thus that they are lending an important adaptive or evolutionary advantage.

There are other instances of genes that both predispose to an illness and lend an important adaptive advantage. In sickle cell disease, for example, red blood cells assume a rigid sickle shape that restricts their passage through tiny blood vessels. This leads to a number of serious physical complications and, in traditional societies, to a radically shortened life expectancy. At the same time, carrying just one allele of the sickle cell gene ('sickle cell trait') makes it impossible for malarial parasites to reproduce inside red blood cells, and so confers immunity to malaria. The fact that the gene for sickle cell anaemia is particularly common in populations from malarial regions suggests that, in evolutionary terms, a debilitating illness in the few can be a price worth paying for an important adaptive advantage in the many.

What important adaptive advantage could depression have? Just as physical pain has evolved to signal injury and to prevent further injury, so depression may have evolved to remove us from distressing, damaging, or futile situations. The time and space and solitude that depression affords prevents us from making rash decisions, enables us to see the bigger picture, and – in the context of being a social animal – to reassess our social relationships, think about those who are significant to us, and relate to them more meaningfully and with greater understanding. Thus, depression may have evolved as a signal that something is seriously wrong and needs working through and changing or, at least, understanding. Sometimes people can become so immersed in the humdrum of their everyday lives that they no longer have the time to think and feel about themselves, and so lose sight of their bigger picture. The experience of depression can force them to stand back at a distance, re-evaluate and prioritise their needs, and formulate a modest but realistic plan for fulfilling them.

## Sorrow's Children

Although the experience of depression can serve such a mundane purpose, it can also enable a person to develop a more refined perspective and deeper understanding of her life and of life in general. From an existential standpoint, the experience of depression obliges the person to become aware of her mortality and freedom, and challenges her to exercise the latter within the framework of the former. By meeting this difficult challenge, the person is able to break out of the mould that has been imposed upon her, discover who she truly is, and, in so doing, begin to give deep meaning to her life. Indeed, many of the most creative and most insightful people in society suffer or suffered from depression. They include the politicians Winston Churchill and Abraham Lincoln; the poets Charles Baudelaire, Hart Crane, Sylvia Plath and Rainer Maria Rilke; the thinkers Michel Foucault, William James, John Stuart Mill, Isaac Newton, Friedrich Nietzsche and Arthur Schopenhauer; and the writers Charles Dickens, William Faulkner, Graham Greene, Leo Tolstoy, Evelyn Waugh, Tennessee Williams and many, many others.

## The Curse of the Strong

People with depression are often stigmatised as 'failures' or 'losers'. Of course, nothing could be further from the truth. If anything, the sorts of people who are most vulnerable to developing depression are all the opposite of failures or losers. If they are suffering from depression, it is most probably because they have tried too hard or taken on too much, so hard and so much that they have made themselves ill with depression. In other words, if they are suffering from depression, it is because their world was simply not good enough for them. They wanted more, they wanted better, and they wanted different, not just for themselves, but for all those around them. So if they are failures or losers, this is only because they set the bar far too high. They could have swept everything under the carpet and pretended, as many people do, that all is for the best in the best of possible worlds. However, unlike many people, they had the honesty and the strength to admit that something was amiss, that something was not quite right. So rather than being failures or losers, they are just the opposite: they are ambitious, truthful and courageous. And that is precisely why they got ill. Getting ill is never a good thing, but in the case of depression it can present a precious opportunity to identify and to address some very challenging life problems, and to develop a deeper and more refined understanding and appreciation of one's life and of life in general.

## A Note of Caution

Depression should not be romanticised, sought out, or left unattended simply because it may or may not predispose to problem-solving, personal development, or creativity. The most severe forms of depression have a strong biological basis and are not related to a person's life circumstances or aspirations. All forms of depression are drab and intensely painful, and most people who suffer from depression would never wish it on anyone, least of all themselves. In some cases, depression can lead to serious injury or even to death through accident, self-neglect, or self-harm. Even highly successful people who suffered from depression such as Hart Crane and Sylvia Plath ended up committing suicide in the end, and most people who attempt suicide do so because they are suffering with some form of depression.

# The Wisdom of Bill Hicks

*by Paul Outhwaite*

American stand-up comedian Bill Hicks once said "As long as one person lives in darkness then it seems to be a responsibility to tell other people". Born in 1961, he did his first stand-up gig aged thirteen and by the mid-eighties was clocking up over 250 nights a year, frequently doing two and three shows a night. Despite being diagnosed with pancreatic cancer in June 1993, he continued to tour up until seven weeks before his death, aged 32, in February 1994. Here was a true crusader – he saw himself as Shiva the Destroyer – relentless in his desire to impart knowledge and understanding, to enlighten as many people as he could. And damn, he was funny as hell too.

Hicks was the best comedian of his generation. Probably would have been the best comedian of this generation too. He had clarity of vision and an unerring perception of people, situations and events; able to unlock delicate ironies and fix audiences upon what is true and what is wise with a vivacity of images and an economy of language, pauses and punchlines effortlessly igniting epiphanies. Take his precise cutting through the abortion debate – "If you're so pro-life, lock arms and block cemeteries" – and his bafflement that anti-abortionists didn't see the irony of "pro-lifers killing doctors".

What Hicks saw, and made it his mission to convey, was the continual erosion of free and imaginative thinking by the hegemony of media and government in collusion. Hicks saw the suppression of thinking as a method of control, to neutralise questioning and supplant it with acceptance: through television, "Lucifer's dreambox" he called it, spewing out garbage such as *American Gladiators* during which you could disengage from any thinking that might lead to questioning: "Go back to bed America, your government is in control…Watch this! Shut up! You are free – to do as we tell you".

He was fighting against the subjugation of intellect. In one of his routines he takes a phone call from Los Angeles, the caller gloating about sitting by a pool in the sun as if that were some kind of aspirational nirvana. Hicks' unimpressed response is "I'm reading a book…yeah, we're thinking back East". It's a simple line, one that declines pretension and effortlessly mocks a modern, superficial culture where erudition and intellect are distrusted and replaced with superficiality.

Hicks had spent his life accumulating knowledge and understanding, which he saw as his duty to impart to people, to "evolve ideas", to cut through the inanities and falsity so prevalent in modern culture. A voracious reader from an early age (there are not many comedians who reference Jung and Chomsky) with an appetite for rolling news, he nonetheless had an extensive knowledge of lowbrow culture, from trashy television and pornography to banal pop and Chuck Norris movies. This broad understanding of culture was added to by a broad understanding of people: Hicks' touring schedule, which had taken him from elegant theatres in England (where he was highly valued and much more appreciated than in his home country) to claustrophobic dead-end clubs in America's deep south, had given him the opportunity to meet a varied cross section of people. Here was a comedian rich in experience and urgent in his need to convey insights that might foster a more accurate comprehension of what we are, and therefore offer hope of what we can be. "Evolution didn't end with us growing opposable thumbs", Hicks would say.

Often presented as a preacher, if you listened to or saw Hicks it was difficult not to be a convert to his philosophy and way of looking at the world. He was courageous, fearless and rebellious in exposing the hypocrisies of the elite. "It's okay to drink your drug…Those untaxed drugs, those are the bad ones", he'd say, railing at alcohol companies "hawking their fuckin' beer commercials" during *War on Drugs* TV specials. "Stay stupid, America. Keep drinking beers. Stay stupid!" was the message Hicks read between the lines of a government drugs policy which seemed designed to discourage people from questioning the status quo. He wondered whether people on pot were unmotivated not because the drug had made them apathetic but because they'd realized "it's not worth the fuckin' effort" (and here he was not cynically advocating apathy but rather deriding a society's pressure to conform to mind-numbing drudgery).

Hicks unpicked the machinations behind the first Gulf War when few

comedians had the cleverness of thought or intellectual daring to do so. He saw the war for what it was: an exercise in American military power where young soldiers flick through weapons catalogues and the media colludes in an exaggeration of the threat posed by Iraq: "People say, uh Bill, Iraq has the fourth largest army in the world. Yeah, maybe, but you know what? After the first three largest armies, there's a real big fuckin' drop off. The Hare Krishnas are the fifth largest army in the world". What was important to Hicks was to convey a truth missing from the jingoism and bloodlust and he didn't care that his view of events jarred with a large majority of the American public.

The application of his perceptions to the form of stand-up comedy stripped information of pretension and obfuscation, creating a clarity that punctured through the disinformation broadcast during the Gulf War. The intelligence reports urgently proclaiming that Iraq is dangerous because it has incredible weapons evoke the response "How do you know that?" before Hicks adopts the persona of a military commander with "Uh, well, we looked at the receipt". His great skill was his ability to offer enlightenment through synthesis, his routines a whirlwind of connections and cross-references held together by a narrative in which frustration and cynicism were merely a means to persuade audiences to see the rightness of his philosophy and join him in breaking down the old order with idealism and inspiration: "The world is like a ride at an amusement park…Don't be afraid, ever, because this is just a ride…And we can change it any time we want…A choice, between fear and love".

His rage was due to what he saw as a collective failure to bring politicians to account, seen most compellingly in routines during the last year of his life – particularly on the 1993 Waco siege, a stand-off between the Branch Davidians and FBI that ended with the storming of the Davidians' compound at Mount Carmel, killing 76 Davidians, men women and children. The government line was that the Davidians were dangerous and had fired first, but cable news had shown footage of a Bradley tank sparking events by shooting fire into the compound. Hicks was mystified that no major news organization picked up this information, which for him meant that "the government, from the FBI, the ATF, up to Janet Reno and including Clinton, are liars and murderers". Ultimately he was baffled that there seemed so little public interest in challenging the FBI version of events.

However, it wasn't just about ranting with this comedian. If wisdom

means anything it means applying knowledge and insight, to elucidate and offer some new progressive direction. Progress would be a world in which the masses stopped being so docile and instead of atrophying in front of the television and accepting its message, sought instead to question, challenge and thus change things. Hicks saw the deficit between what we know to be true and rational and the actions and responses of humanity. It's not even fuzzy idealism when he calls for money spent on nuclear weapons and defence to be spent instead on "feeding and clothing the poor of the world… not one human being excluded". It's simply right and true, and an obscenity not to acknowledge it as such.

Stand-up comedians don't age very well. Listen to Lenny Bruce now and you're more likely to be impressed by the jazz rhythms of his delivery than laugh out loud at his comedy. Stand-up comedians are necessarily vibrant commentators on their times. But what makes Hicks special is that he had a gift for finding the blind spot of irony in situations and events, giving his material a durability and the truths therein a universality. Contemporary culture would have continued to annoy Bill were he alive today. Twenty years ago he was frustrated by the squandering of humanity's talents and thereby its possibilities: "We have at our fingertips the greatest minds of all time, the knowledge and history of the greatest thinkers of all fuckin' time" and yet we allow ourselves to be sidetracked by the freak show of talentless pop stars, cynical television and the empty rhetoric of debates over abortion,

pornography and flag burning.

Why is it we seem to listen to the most superficially emotive side of the argument? Why not the voice of reason? It is what Noam Chomsky called "the stranglehold of ideology and tradition of conformism that makes a mockery of the values we pretend to hold". It's the cynical manipulation of true, honest values so that patriotism becomes a tool to engender conformity, free thinking is presented as suspicious and compassion is attacked as weak-willed, with even the word liberalism absorbed into the right wing lexicon as a pejorative term.

Twenty years on we are still sucked in by it all: Saddam has weapons of mass destruction, the War on Terror means vote Republican, reality television routinely presents humanity as a subject for ridicule, the budget deficit needs tightening so you the tax payer must foot the bill. And the Jonas Brothers sell millions of records.

Hicks saw the role of the comedian as "the guy who says 'wait a minute' as the consensus forms". That pause for thought involved drawing on the past, questioning the information, poking at the greyness between black and white. It was his genius to flip perceptions, to offer an alternative way of looking at things we never think deeply enough about. See the sheer gut laugh brilliance and innovative perspective of the observation "A lot of Christians wear crosses around their necks…you think when Jesus comes back he's ever gonna wanna see another fuckin' cross?". In our quick fix culture of instant gratification, today's news blasts out like some *Brass Eye* parody, and recent history and the wisdom it should have engendered has been wiped out by the cathode ray spewing banality and bias.

Bill Hicks gave us an insight into the debased side of human nature, holding it up to ridicule so that we could see that humanity is better than that. He left behind a body of work that is still achingly funny and still able to inspire. Modern comedy, in its postmodern knowingness, at best dilutes irony, at worst becomes an excuse for racism, sexism and cruelty. Hicks' comedy was ultimately optimistic – he'd sucked out the marrow of life and wanted to pass on what a wonderful ride it was – his rage that of a preacher seeking to purge the poisonous fear and hatred engendered by a misguided modern society. He often used an image of his comedy as planting seeds, hoping that from them an alternative, clearer way of thinking would grow, offering hope because, as he saw it, "we are better and more unique creatures than this and all eternity is our playground".

# How I ‘Leaned’ my Life

*by Daniel James Paterson*

> Make no expense but to do good to others or yourself.
> BENJAMIN FRANKLIN

A few years ago my job was to visit factories and implement a waste-reduction methodology known as ‘Lean’. By showing manufacturers how to eliminate actions that consume time, resources or space but do not add value to the company or consumer, I helped my clients achieve higher returns while providing customers with higher quality products at a lower cost.

But while I was fascinated by the processes I was implementing, I was yearning for something else; for that ‘next level’ of personal development. I wanted to make my ‘unique contribution’ – you know, that unique and worthwhile act that only you can make, because of the unique set of experiences and wisdom that makes you you; that worthwhile act that if you weren’t here to make wouldn’t get made by anyone else.

Champions of Lean say that if you want to encourage your company to get serious about transforming the way it operates, you have to find a lever – often some specific challenge or event. Inadvertently I had identified my own lever; so I grasped it. Like others before me, I figured that new understanding and personal evolution come from new inner and outer awareness. So I went travelling, to gain more of both.

Firstly, to Asia, where I worked in various volunteering roles. The work was both personally rewarding and beneficial to others, but as a specialist in manufacturing I began to suspect that I was running away from my true calling rather than finding it. Sometimes you can get so close to what you care about most that you perceive faults too readily then push too far away. I

came around to believing that to find my unique contribution I needed to go back to doing what I was best at.

I just didn't know how, exactly. It was while travelling through Africa that it clicked. Witnessing amazing organisations achieving strong social missions through manufacturing activities – such as employing blind people to assemble jewelry, with the profits being used to provide housing and medical care for the employees – I realised that if we could help improve the manufacturing capability of such organisations, then the social good they created would increase proportionately too.

I also witnessed, most importantly, how international development can be determined by local populations themselves whilst operating within the market mechanism. I began to wonder whether the internet might be able to help such manufacturing-driven social enterprises by connecting them with online micro-volunteers from all over the world who could help them solve their 'bottleneck problems' – those small manufacturing issues at the heart of the 'Leaning' process that, once solved, have a major impact on manufacturing capability.

Manufacturing is, in essence, a force for good – as human development is primarily achieved by the manufacture and assembly of physical objects to improve quality of life. But I figured that perhaps the sheer numbers involved – potentially 10,000 micro-volunteers – would make a difference much greater than a dedicated few on the ground otherwise could. I also figured that this might even create a two-way exchange of ideas. Departing from the usual picture of the developing world as a patient, perhaps it could serve instead as a model for manufacturing around the world; perhaps, indeed, this 'local and social' approach to manufacturing could also help alleviate the impending global resource shortage. I resolved to return home and create a micro-volunteering organisation and website: ManufacturingChange.org.

To increase my chances of succeeding, I found myself applying Lean principles to my own practices. Many of these methods were not premeditated but instead evolved as I progressed, yet the result was clear. One of the core goals of Lean is the freeing up of human potential by removing waste and optimising processes, to allow employees to focus on adding value where only a person can – such as by improving product quality or building supplier relationships. I found, similarly, that through Lean principles I was able to free up my own human potential, and to work longer and harder on the things that really mattered to me.

In recent years, Lean has been successfully applied not just to manufacturing, but to healthcare, airlines, governments, and the services and administration industries, to name but a few. This essay is about how I Leaned my own life, hoping to make my 'unique contribution' a reality.

## The Origins of Lean

> The time is coming when every person who lays claim to ability will keep the question of waste before him constantly.
>
> THOMAS A. EDISON

The concept of 'Lean' was first identified in the 1990s, but the further back you go in history, the more you discover that Lean thinking has roots in individual folk wisdom. For instance, the proverb 'waste not, want not' is about as old as they come, and expresses a theme that has recurred throughout the centuries. But as industrialisation has progressed, a more systematic approach to waste reduction has developed too. Some say the 'Arsenale' – a shipyard and naval depot in Venice in the 1450s – was the earliest example of a Lean industry. Others recall the work of constructionist Frank Gilbreth, who in 1894 introduced the 'non-stooping scaffold' which delivered bricks at waist level, enabling masons to work three times as quickly and with less wasteful effort. Others point also to the management theories developed around the same time by Frederick Winslow Taylor, which helped to improve workflows and labour productivity in the manufacturing industries.

Most agree, however, that it was in the practices of Henry Ford that Lean production really got going. In the 1910s, American industrialists recognised that increasingly cheap offshore labour was a threat to mainland jobs, and so the goal of waste reduction was adopted as a countermeasure. Ford was one adherent. The mass-assembly system he developed at Highland Park in 1913 placed a premium on what he called 'flow production' to minimise wasted time and effort.

Ford's success stunned the world and nowhere more so than in Japan. In the 1930s, Kiichiro Toyoda, Taiichi Ohno and their colleagues studied Ford's ideas and developed the 'Toyota Production System' (TPS). In a nutshell, the goal of TPS is to avoid waste by getting the right things to the right place at the right time in the right quantity to enable a better work flow, while using empirical observation to monitor the effectiveness with

which this is achieved, and thereby allow workers to plan and implement improvements to their own processes.

TPS identifies seven areas of waste (the seven deadly manufacturing sins, if you like). They are: transport (moving things around in a way that doesn't actually contribute to processing); inventory (consisting of any components, works in progress or finished products which are not being processed); motion (people or equipment moving or walking more than is required to perform the processing); waiting (for the next production step); overproduction (production ahead of demand); over-processing (resulting from poor tool or product design); and defects (the effort involved in inspecting for, and fixing, errors).

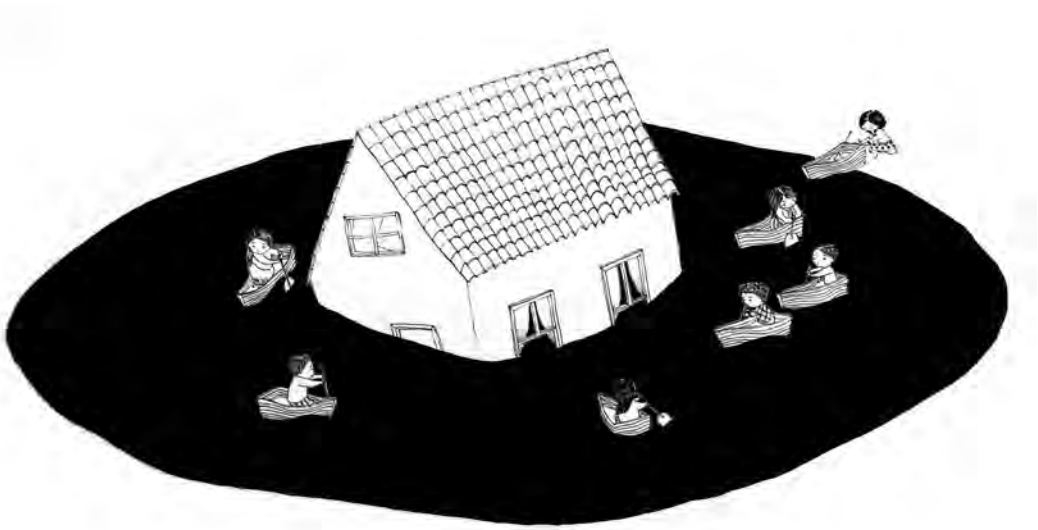
To illustrate the extent of this focus on waste, a student of TPS, Shigeo Shingo, observed that only the final turn of a bolt tightens it – all the rest is merely movement adding no value to the customer. This illuminates how value-adding activity is distinguished from non-value-adding work. Non-value-adding work is the waste that is necessary given the way that a production process is currently configured. Thus, the key to Lean is to achieve the same value in terms of the product produced, but to do so with less work. The Lean specialists James P. Womack and Daniel T. Jones estimate that, prior to Leaning an organisation, nine out of ten steps it undertakes in generating a value stream can be counted as waste, and eliminated.

And so, in my efforts to make my time and savings go further, I turned Lean full circle – from the scientific precision of its modern industrial applications to my own homely efforts as an individual trying to live more wisely. I became my own manager and customer, and strove to waste less and achieve more without compromising the quality of my output. My life changed. Well, about nine tenths of it did.

## Going Lean

> To the engineer falls the job of clothing the bare bones of science with life, comfort and hope.
>
> HERBERT HOOVER

It started with the kitchen cupboard. One day I opened it and stared at a shambles of studenty comestibles – various bags of pasta and rice spilling their contents, a host of spices I couldn't pronounce, tins of beans, tomatoes



and fruit in pre-apocalyptic quantities, and enough porridge oats to fuel a rugby team for a season. I didn't even remember buying some of that stuff. My thoughts turned to what I used to avidly tell my clients was the "mother of all wastes": inventory.

You might think that lots of inventory (colloquially called "stock") is a good thing. A factory that has plenty of it can supply customers with whatever they need whenever they need it, right? Not so. Inventory means more mess, bigger storage space, inefficiencies in searching, money tied up, obsolescence of products, and difficulty in spotting defects – all of which are highly wasteful. Over-inventory in fact makes factories *more* likely to run out of stock, not less. As counter-intuitive as this may sound, heaving stockrooms tend to obscure specific deficits, and hence companies often end up like Alanis Morissette – with 'ten thousand spoons when all you need is a knife'.

So a person with an overflowing larder gets to eat whatever he likes whenever he wants, right? Wrong! I set about changing the way I shopped, to be less wasteful – to create less mess and more space, to make it easier to find ingredients when I needed them, to tie up less of my money in giant bags of dry lentils, to avoid food passing its sell-by-date, and, above all, to eat what I wanted when I wanted. This also had the knock-on benefit of making me less likely to convenience shop, and so avoid paying inflated prices for items I didn't realise I'd run out of until it was too late.

To make my shopping more efficient, I adopted the 'Just in Time'

method advocated by Lean. The idea is to keep as little inventory as possible, through only acquiring new stock at the point when a particular item is about to run out. Thus, I was never overrun by food; and I never ran out of food. An analogy used in Lean is that of a river which obscures obstacles beneath the surface when the waterline is too high. By taking the level of food in my cupboard down, I was able to see instantly when I needed to replace things.

This is an example of when a process tells you what to do, so you don't have to think about it. Now, as evening approaches and I begin to feel hungry, I worry less about whether I've got the ingredients for a particular meal, because I know that the Just in Time system ensures that the contents of my cupboard are systematically replenished.

I still need to go to the shops, of course. But that's another area in which Lean made a difference to my life. When I left my previous work, I was determined that from then on I would locate my work, living and shopping within a much more circumscribed area. This was quite easy to achieve working from home, since the majority of things I needed were available online. But I also made sure to live close enough to the shops, as well as places to relax in, such as parks and cafes. Keeping most of my activities within a five mile radius is great. I can cycle most journeys, never needing to pay for petrol or bus fares – and since cycling is generally the quickest mode of transport in urban spaces, I'm saving time too. The result is that I've significantly reduced the waste associated with motion (moving around as a worker) and transport (moving things around) in my life.

Another great thing about cycling is that I get to exercise while going to the shops or going out, thus saving time overall as I don't need to exercise as a separate activity (a benefit familiar to cycle commuters everywhere). Keeping fit is certainly a Lean thing to do, and I'm not just talking about staying in shape. The human body is a tool that works at varying degrees of optimisation, and fitness makes a difference to how effectively human effort translates into results. In other words, fitness affects the level of waste associated with performing day-to-day activities.

It is medically well-established that moderate daily exercise makes you feel more energised (have you ever noticed how laying in front of the TV just makes you feel more fatigued?). By being physically sharper I was able to achieve the mental sharpness I needed in order to do all the imagining, planning and programming necessary for setting up ManufacturingChange.org. Exercise also helped raise my mood, which made me more productive

(as happier people work harder). Again, though, I tried not to work too hard on these things, just as I tried not to over-exercise. Lean industries practise 'level-loading', where work is carried out in a sustainable way by finding the optimum level of daily processing for long-term productivity, in both workers and systems.

The philosopher Immanuel Kant said that whereas 'science is organised knowledge, wisdom is organised life'. A big part of my effort to transfer Lean principles to my daily existence was simply in improving my personal organisation. Being organised enables you to avoid many types of waste. You waste less time looking for things (and money, too, replacing them), you prepare better for journeys or meetings thus avoiding getting lost or wasting the trip, and you end up with fewer penalties such as fines for unpaid bills. In Lean industries, people talk about eliminating waste through avoiding defects – in my life it was a case of avoiding mess-ups. I even made sure I rented a room all-inclusive of bills, so I wouldn't have the extra hassle (and liability) of paying each separately. I sought to keep my space tidy, because I was working from home, and I knew that poor arrangement of the workplace is a common complaint made by Lean consultants. I made sure I put things back in the same place I took them from, didn't leave things lying around, and kept my desk neat by staying on top of my paperwork and emails.

ManufacturingChange.org launched in May 2011. But even this was a Lean event. Well aware of the perils of 'overproduction' – production ahead of demand – I tried to get the website finished to a degree commensurate with the immediate needs of its market. I figured that because open-source enterprises need a critical mass of contributors before becoming useful, I needed to focus my programming on attracting and connecting new members to the site. On my 'to do' list was a bonanza of all-singing, all-dancing features planned for the future, so I was constantly tempted to delay the launch until they were all in place and working perfectly, but I resisted. It was less of a priority to get this functionality in place than to fulfill the immediate requirement, which was to get volunteers on board and communicating with each other about the new organisation.

## Less is More

> Thrift…is more than the mere practice of saving money: it implies rather a denunciation of every form of waste, not only of money, but of time,

energy, talents, and other assets of mankind.

THE TIMES, OCTOBER 26, 1938.

From its conception to its launch, I spent only £7,000 a year while working on ManufacturingChange.org. That figure included everything: rent, transport, bills, clothes, phone calls, food and socialising. Yes, that's right, socialising. Conscious of the fact that being miserable would make me less likely to succeed, not more, I didn't deprive myself of so-called 'luxuries'. As Samuel Johnson sublimely said, 'a man who both spends and saves money is the happiest man, because he has both enjoyments'. And, as Thoreau remarked similarly: 'I am convinced both by faith and experience, that to maintain one's self on this earth is not a hardship but a pastime, if we will live simply and wisely'.

In any case, I knew very well that Lean is not about mindless cost-cutting. This notion fundamentally misses the purpose of the exercise, which is to create value through eliminating waste. So while the odd treat was all well and good, I kept firmly in mind the overarching value I was striving to create: an internet resource for aiding manufacturing-driven social enterprises in Africa. In this way, my thriftiness was all about value; all about achieving a positive outcome.

Indeed, throughout the ages, many eminent figures can be heard observing that thrift is not about diminishing but generating possibilities in life. 'By sowing frugality we reap liberty, a golden harvest', said the Spartan king Agesilaus; 'the scope of thrift is limitless', implored the inventor Thomas Edison; 'thrift means that you should always have the best you can possibly afford, when the thing has any reference to your physical and mental health, to your growth in efficiency and power', observed the writer Orison Swett Marden. The industrialist Owen Young summed up these ideas more prosaically:

> We are not to judge thrift solely by the test of saving or spending. If one spends what he should prudently save, that certainly is to be deplored. But if one saves what he should prudently spend, that is not necessarily to be commended. A wise balance between the two is the desired end.

Although the triumphs of civilisation have been built on the resourcefulness, efficiency, and, yes, thrift, of visionaries such as these,

thrift today is commonly defined as stinginess, miserliness and meanness. Such caricatures surely have a lot to do with the 'consumer complex' that commentators have increasingly been deriding, namely, a cultural environment in which declining to spend, spend, spend, is considered to be a moral failing. As we pull out of the current recession, perhaps the notion of thrift will be reclaimed and resurrected as being a moral achievement: a virtue possessed by the most noble among us. After all, as the nineteenth-century politician Lord Rosebery noted: 'whatever thrift is, it is not avarice. Avarice is not generous… it is the thrifty people who are generous'.

## Lean-spirited

> The Toyota Production System is described as a manufacturing system, but the thinking of TPS or Lean applies to any function. Whether you're dealing with 15,000 parts, 15 parts, or just providing a service, Lean works. It works because it is a way of thinking, a whole systems philosophy.
>
> JOHN SHOOK

It's easy to find yourself waxing philosophical when extolling the ways of Lean. That's because above all Lean *is* a philosophy – in the sense of a mindset, an outlook. The website Lean.org talks about 'Lean consciousness'; a commitment to improvement through continuous learning and adapting. The learning component is both empirical and rational; meaning that real results should be evaluated, and rigorous thinking applied to the task of achieving better ones. Lean thinking is about having the discipline to realise that 'good enough' never is; that doing a job inefficiently out of habit is one of the major forms of waste in modern workplaces. Every Lean success will invariably uncover new problems and greater challenges: all of which must be met with the same vigour as their predecessors.

Lean leaders are steeped in this practical, logical, aspirational kind of awareness. Theirs is the role of defining the long-term vision and challenges for an organisation, but also ensuring that each of its talents gets put to best use. Lean leaders are hands-on, going to the source of a problem to analyse what's really happening, yet always responsive to feedback and seeking to achieve a consensus. As well as coaching and teaching, Lean leadership is about questioning. Based on the traditional Japanese concept of Sensei (professional/master), the idea is for Lean leaders to instruct by interacting

and inspiring, never by decree.

At the heart of Lean is a respect for people. This aspect of TPS is less known outside of Toyota – too many Western interpretations tend to focus on mechanising humans rather than humanising mechanisms, the truer aim. Respect in Lean is about building trust and long-term relationships, through treating stakeholders' problems seriously and taking responsibility for other people reaching their objectives. It's about the importance of teamwork, and developing individuals through team problem-solving.

So, in the end, Lean is all about individuals, like me, growing and improving – by virtue of being exposed to a humane methodology that espouses efficiency, improvement, learning, reason and, above all, waste reduction. Once a person has absorbed the Lean methodology and developed the ensuing philosophical outlook, they can apply its characteristic thinking to any area.

In other words: *you* could Lean your life too.

## Lean your Life

> We are not here merely to make a living. We are here to enrich the world.
>
> WOODROW WILSON

Society often reminds itself that it is driven by the maxim 'time is money', but many people today are just as concerned about the equivalent fact that 'money is time'. Among us, there is a great yearning for change, for creating a more humane and ethical world – and for each and every one of us to be able to make our unique contribution. Yet doing so often seems beyond our reach as individuals. "I'd love to change career, go part-time, work with people, make a difference", we lament, "but I just don't have the time – or the money".

Charles Buxton wisely said that 'you will never "find" time for anything. If you want time, you must make it'. So with time and money being equivalent, if you are eager for change, you must make better use of both. Leaning your life can help you achieve this – and, thereby, whatever internal or external goals you've set. Reducing waste will minimise the amount of time and money you spend on non-value-generating activities, so you can generate more of what you value. Lean is a methodical, down-to-earth and practical process that amplifies the little things most of us are already doing in our lives. It's about being yourself, only better.

# About the Authors

**Professor Lord Layard** directs the Well-Being Programme at the London School of Economics. He is a labour economist who has made major contributions on unemployment, inflation, inequality and post-Communist reform. He also now advises the government on mental health policy. Layard currently works on how to produce a happier society and is the author of the influential book *Happiness*, which brings together findings from psychology, neuroscience, economics, sociology and philosophy. With Geoff Mulgan and Anthony Seldon, he launched 'Action for Happiness' earlier this year.

**Theodore Dalrymple** is a retired doctor who wrote a column in *The Spectator* for 14 years. He is contributing editor to the *City Journal of New York*, and writes regularly for many foreign publications. He is the author of *Life at the Bottom, Junk Medicine, Spoilt Rotten* and other books. He is about to publish an essay on the social meaning of litter.

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**Stephen Bayley** was once described as 'the second most intelligent man in Britain'. This is controversial and very possibly untrue, but he is indisputably one of the world's best known commentators on modern culture. Tom Wolfe said of him 'I don't know anybody with more interesting observations about style, taste and contemporary design'. As well as being an architecture and design correspondent, he is a consultant and author.

**Paul Outhwaite** is author of *One Consciousness – An Analysis of Bill Hicks' Comedy*, the definitive study of Hicks' craft and the cultural influences on his stand-up. As well as writing books on cinema, *Badlands – Terrence Malick* and *Invasion of the Body Snatchers – Don Siegel*, Outhwaite has worked in fiction with cult sci-fi satire *Automatic Living* and punk novel *The Preachers on Manic Street*. His most recent work is a proposed drama series, *A Cure for All Ills*.

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The whole problem with the world is that
fools and fanatics are always so certain of themselves,
but wiser men so full of doubts.

BERTRAND RUSSELL