

Dr. Mezmer's Psychopedia of Bad Psychology



A. MESMER

as regurgitated to

A.J. Marr

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Mezmer's Encyclopedia of Bad Psychology

ADHD

Working as I do from a home office, there comes a time after a few days of making phone calls, penning memos, and drafting proposals, that I begin to feel, well, stir crazy. If I were not such a well-socialized individual who is ever cognizant of my wife's potential retribution, I would have hurled objects through the window, thrown temper tantrums, and become a veritable domestic delinquent. Luckily, I can also schedule appointments to see customers far from town, which quiets the little anarchist within me, and fortifies me upon my return for another few days of tedium.

There's nothing magical about the human mind's need to have some change of pace, and nothing perverse when the same mind goes loco when it doesn't get it's way. Luckily, adult minds can control for this, and let off steam, create diversions, or simply leave town when things get too boring. No such luck however if you're a five year old kid, for your inability to articulate your boredom makes you prey to the prescriptive powers of a new type of vampire, the psychologist. For the psychologist, simple learning won't do, we need a syndrome, a disease, something that is prescribed by counsel and remedied by prescription. And so, going stir crazy is now a spanking new disease, ADHD (or attention deficit hyperactive disorder), a malady our grandparents never had when they were kids, as well as nobody else in the world outside of the continental USA. Perhaps it's due to the fact that physical education and simple recess has been waning in a country more concerned with safety, budgets, and high SAT scores. So how come with all our smarts we take the harder way out, and skirt the obvious while heading to the ridiculous? Why, money of course.

In psychology the nature/nurture, learning/instinct debate is slanted by the market place for the simple fact that an appeal to instinct and nature can command a fee. For manic behavior due to a cockeyed environment, changing the venue is like changing the dial; it remedies ennui and is free. But if you can make that behavior due to some instinctive or genetic trait, then you've got the makings of a lucrative industry. And so we drug our children while keeping them locked away in classroom dungeons, and provide the funds for psychologists to trumpet their incompetence in books, seminars, and the Oprah show. It drives me mad, an illness that I fear in this new age of ignorance, only Prozac can cure.

Anthropic Principle

In a 'A Nice Place to Visit', a classic episode of the 50's sci-fi anthology 'The Twilight Zone', a burglar is shot while escaping, and awakens to a jovial Santa Claus like figure who informs him that he is quite dead, and as a reward for his peculiar virtues, can have anything his heart desires. Naturally, he asks for the predictable stuff: wine, women, power, success. Soon, he become painfully bored with the all too certain largess of his new found 'life', and asks his angelic mentor to relieve him of his boredom, from this 'heaven'.



Be careful what you wish for....

To which the angel replied laughing: 'What made you think this was heaven?'

And that's the problem, not with the stuff mind you, but with its predictability. Human beings, as befits their heritage as foraging mammals, are not built to entertain predictable things. Give them sameness and they will rebel in pain, and die from boredom. And yet we perversely desire certainty, starting with a clear vision of God, and a place in heaven where it's all so *damn predictable*, which is a most ironic phrase to be sure.

In physics, we have discovered that the universe is exquisitely tuned for a life. The fact that we exist is almost literally a miracle. Move an electron's orbit an infinitesimal bit wider, and the whole universe would implode, explode, or be otherwise inhospitable to the likes of you and me. This is called the Anthropic Principle. But there is a psychological anthropic principle that makes our brief moment in time necessarily unpredictable. Indeed, just as a low oxygen level is not conducive to life, boredom is not conducive to living. In the near future, the highway to

hell will be paved with not good intentions, but with good technology that makes the good life all too certain. Thankfully, I will not be around, but if the angels permit, I will be moaning anew about an uncertain stock market, traffic problems, and problematic kids. Ah, heaven!

Attention

A fundamental premise that shaped physics up to the end of the 19th century was that nature abhorred a vacuum. Empty space, even in outer space, had something to it, namely a substance called the aether that was the medium that allowed light to get by. Of course, a cosmic aether didn't change the speed of light, no matter where the aetherial wind was blowing. So because it didn't change light in any predictable way, it was abandoned.

Like particles or waves of light, behavior is shaped through 'reasons', those stimuli impinging on us or created by us that as arranged and conceived through conceptual metaphor 'drive' behavior. But behavior passes through a similar aether that seems to shape behavior independently of the objective reasons we have to behave. This psychological aether is called attention. For every moment of existence, we are just swimming in attention, the eddies and currents of awareness that sculpt behavior like water shapes a rock. Whatever we do, however we are doing it, attention is there as the medium through which behavior flows. That is, attention, like aether, allows us to get by. Yet, do we need it?



Attention Grabber

Well, no. Attention is not a thing, but an aspect of a thing. It is no more than a taxonomy or classification scheme for the specific events that drive behavior. Paying attention means nothing in itself save for the stimulus events rendered as cognition or behavior that 'occupy' and thus define attention. In psychology, attention is rarely used as an independent or controlling variable, yet nothing we see or do can take place without using the term. That is because attention is, like the x factor in $2x=4$, a very useful 'unknown' variable, or a descriptor for an obscure event that drives behavior that we will get around to defining, someday. In other words, if we say that such and such behaves in a way because he wasn't paying attention, it ain't attention that's the cause, but implied reasons that define attention.

The problem is that attention can become a defacto stimulus, and thus needs no more elaboration, even though it has no stimulus properties whatsoever. To illustrate, in meditation and hypnosis, the causal event of attention is rendered as a specific stimulus event, even though it is never defined. However, if you don't know what your independent variable is, you won't really know what the dependent variable is either.

Thus we have psychological magic, with attention being a mere sleight of hand that moves us like a will o the wisp to somewhere we scarcely know. So attention is a great device to define something without defining what you're talking about. (this is also called psychobabble or outright fraud) Indeed, this is a problem that we all should pay attention.

Bad Psychology

Bad psychology is a branch of bad science, and like bad science, it should be easy to separate the good from the boring, bland, or really awful. Problem is, unlike the physical and biological sciences, in the social sciences our language too often gets in the way. Science of course begins and ends with description, and description is merely an aspect of language, and is no more than a bunch of logically related symbols which correspond to or map the sum of our experience. Scientific inquiry starts with a symbolic accounting of these facts, which can mount up with the unending detail of a detective's casebook. And truly, a scientist is a detective. In the popular imagination, he's like a character from 'Dagnet', a Joe Friday lookalike with a white coat and an observant eye who looks upon mother nature with a mixture of dispassion and awe, and proceeds to ask her for 'just the facts, mam'.

Of course, in modern life the facts often just won't do, since their sheer profusion can easily do us in, so we shorten or parse the facts of life by explaining how we act and feel in terms of similar situations that we can analogously relate to. *Like you know what I mean?* In other words, we explain the world with analogy or metaphor, because more detailed explanations would be too long, too confusing, and are in general pretty unnecessary.

Take for example, a child's description of throwing a ball. "Billy threw the ball real hard to get way high to fall out yonder with a big thud." We can easily understand Billy's behavior and fill in all of the blanks in this description such as the facts of his throwing motion, his stance, and the arch of his throw. We 'know' these things because we've been there, done that, or at the very least have seen it being done. What we can't know and usually don't need to know is the force applied to the ball, its inertia, speed, exact angle, level of wind resistance, and the other physical factors which allow us to exactly reproduce Billy's behavior and predict where the ball will go. These facts constitute the subject matter of the science of physics, which uses a special language of its own, the calculus, to figure out exactly where Billy's ball is going. The calculus also has the side benefit of being applicable to all sorts of moving objects in space, such as cannonballs, pistons, and orbiting satellites, as all calculus afflicted high school students surely know.

We use Billy's language to describe physical objects when we generally want to communicate the facts of observation and experience. However, if we sought to apply such thinking to bridge building, locomotive engines, and rockets, our subsequent career path would become suddenly confined to becoming chief engineer for some yet undiscovered Indian tribe in New Guinea. That's because a single metaphorical description does not make for a complete description of that event, as science represents the attempt to achieve *complete* descriptions from many different perspectives and methodologies. This brings us now to our definition of bad science. *Bad science is merely the supposition that a single metaphorical description of an event represents a complete description of an event.* Billy's description of the mechanics of ball throwing is Ok as a way of generally communicating what he is doing, but its bad science if he thinks it's a complete description of his behavior.

Bad science occurs when you think you're being scientific, when actually you're not. That is, when you think you've got it, and completely understand a particular subject, you actually don't. The delusion of completeness that permeates bad science has the insidious quality of short circuiting the analytical faculties in one's brain since, after all, nothing more can be added. Thus, if Billy thinks the physics of throwing a ball is completely described by saying he threw it real hard, then he has no more need to think about the mechanics of throwing balls. This is bad news if Billy has aspirations of becoming a rocket scientist. But even though most of us don't aspire to scientific careers, we still know that a statement such as the "the sun rises" represents a mere metaphor. That is, the sun acts *as if* it were rising, as we implicitly know that the sun's actual movements are only accessible by levels of description that aren't in the province of common speech.

Analogies are half truths, and like a dot to dot image, we obligingly yet unconsciously fill in the gaps. But how do we implicitly know that there are higher truths out there that describe Billy's behavior a heck of a lot better? Clearly, we know that the statement that Billy threw the ball hard is not really a complete description of his behavior, but merely a cipher or placeholder that ultimately implies what the true facts are, even if we never consciously derive them. For the physics of everyday life, we guard against the conclusion that common sense descriptions are complete descriptions because we know that Billy's throwing behavior is exhaustively described by the pre-established laws of physics. That is, we can jump from partial (but easy and speedy) descriptions as provided by common language to complete (but slow and difficult) descriptions that are provided by physics. Knowing even the rudiments of physics allows us to describe throwing behavior more realistically, improves our chances of controlling the behavior of the ball, and keeps us from hypothesizing weird and unlikely intermediary

causes (e.g. , planetary conjunctions, or that taco I had for lunch today) that don't bestow any predictive power at all.

Now, if Billy was stubborn, and a bit stupid, he may figure that physics books may have nothing much to teach him, since his own common sense language pretty accurately describes the necessary facts of throwing balls. Thus, throwing the ball hard means that it will go very high, and throwing the ball really hard means it will go very, very high. If the facts of throwing can only be generally described, then Billy cannot describe the specific details, but at least he can establish the *reliability* of his observation. To do this, Billy interviewed a few dozen or so of his buddies, and found to his great satisfaction that they too reported that throwing the ball real hard resulted in the ball going a lot farther than if they said they threw it softly. But to his amazement, he also discovered that some of them said that the ball would go a bit further if they put a little body english on the ball, or put a spin on it, or after they rubbed a lucky rabbit's foot. By noting the correlations of all of these "constructs" with the movement of the ball, Billy could make all sorts of correlations between high balls, low balls, top spins, and rabbit feet. Although he didn't know it at the time, Billy had discovered the perfect companion to bad science, namely, bad research! Indeed, when Billy grew up and entered college, he applied advance statistics to his observations to demonstrate that throwing a ball far is as easy as a real hard throw and a rabbit's foot or two.

What is Bad Research?

Bad research confirms bad science, and proves once again the old computer maxim, garbage in, garbage out. Bad research has the virtue of reaffirming that you don't know what you're talking about, but this time

with **authority**. Bad research merely verifies what you have poorly described, and in the large, makes your bad description consistent with everybody else's. So if everyone else confidently predicts the flight of balls through the use of common sense language, then by virtue of your consistency with everybody's opinion, your description of the mechanics of throwing a ball must be complete. Demonstrating the reliability of an observation does not bring you any closer to validating or describing the processes which underlie that observation, but with so many people agreeing with you, how can you be wrong? Besides, often the processes which cause an event to occur can never be known, so its safe to ignore them and concentrate on the correlations which we can put to use in our daily lives.

This type of thinking is Ok for common folk, who may never know or care to know much about the workings of the more complex facts of life. It's enough to know merely that A causes B, and behave accordingly. For example, we know smoking causes cancer, but we are perfectly content with the easy analogy that smoking in some metaphorical way causes cancer. The correlation between smoking and cancer that was discovered from comparing the medical histories of millions of smokers and non-smokers shortened the long series of biological causes and effects that occur for each individual to a neat and easily remembered cause-effect link. Of course, this common sense view does not forestall the scientific endeavor to discover actual physical linkages between the components of cigarette smoke and the cell damage that ultimately results in cancer. Indeed, few well informed people would assume that the link was so simple. The original research which established a correlation between cancer and smoking would only represent bad research if the results were interpreted to represent the final say on the matter. That is, A causes B, and we need not look at anything in between

because it's impractical, unnecessary, or because intermediary events are simply not there.

We accept the rules of science when it comes to the behavior of amoebae, frogs, balls, and rockets, and understand and appreciate the ever refined descriptions of biological and physical events that provide ways of looking at the processes which animate our world. From DNA to Quantum Theory, these new descriptions allow us to fill out the common sense world of cause and effect, and permit the generation of new procedures that underlie the practical disciplines that range from genetic engineering to computer science.

Unfortunately, the same hard headed approach to science that characterizes the physical and biological sciences is scarcely evident in the social sciences, which for the most part uses the lingua franca of common speech and common sense as the best measure of man, and his behavior. Because we use common speech in our day to day lives, it's easy to accept explanations which are based on those terms. Thus, if I need a pencil, we normally wouldn't think twice if some learned psychologist postulated some inner psychological need for pencils. Likewise, the easy observation that Billy throws balls well (lets say he's playing for the Yankees now) because he has a need to achieve, has a lot of character and courage, and loves God and country can easily translate into a roster of psychological needs, traits, and drives whose endless correlations can fill rows of journals and racks of pop psychology books.

What makes much of psychology so bad is its presumptive arrogance, the assumption that explanations for behavior can be valid simply because they refer to the accepted authority of common speech and the consensus of common opinions. Unfortunately, the motives which drive Billy as well as his own account of how he throws a ball both serve to

explain his behavior, but they still don't quite fully *describe* his behavior. When no higher terminology is available that, like the laws of physics, can accurately describe the facts of behavior, then common sense terms are used instead. However, common sense can only partially describe behavior. Ultimately, you need a better language to describe behavior, but how do you derive such a language?

What is good science, or scientific thinking?

Scientific thinking is, well, elementary. Like Sherlock Holmes, you start out with some obvious facts, connect them with a bridge of hypothetical events, and proceed by a logical process of elimination to a final explanation that, regardless of how unlikely, is true. Now most of the workings of the world are hidden to even the most astute intellects, and we often come across gaps in our description of events that require the creation of new entities that can fill in those gaps, and make the resulting description neat and tidy. This is called saving the appearances. For example, to medieval scientists, concepts like fire and the transmission of light could only be partly described. To save the appearances and give the semblance that they knew what they were talking about, they hypothesized mysterious entities called phlogiston and ether that were respectively the agent of combustion and the medium that transmitted light. Of course these new concepts added nothing to the understanding or prediction of how fires start and how light travels through space. But it made these explanations at least sound more erudite, and the pretensions of being wise, then as now, counted for public respect, funding, and most importantly, tenure! Of course, phlogiston and ether have long since been discarded by contemporary physicists. Whether they exist or not is anybody's guess, as they, like leprechauns, centaurs, and men from mars, can never be

totally disproved. What is true is that they proved to be totally useless. Since we don't need phlogiston to build or explain fires, and we don't need ether to explain the speed or composition of light, scientists have rightly discarded them as unnecessary verbal baggage.

Now saving the appearances is generally not a bad thing, and indeed is the essence of the scientific enterprise. It is what scientists do, and gives them a reason for, well, being scientists. Saving the appearances is called deduction, or deriving particular facts (e.g. The butler did it.) from general observations (e.g. Mr. White, in the pantry, with the nylons). However, to play the game of science, you must not just make a deduction, for that's child's play, but justify it and prove it to be true. That is, the rules of scientific deduction not only mean that you must have something to actually deduce, but that there must be some logical reason why you are making that deduction, and some logical way you can later demonstrate that your deduction represents a real fact. For example, to say to a traffic cop that demons made you go through a stop sign is not exactly something one would logically derive from the circumstances, and it is certainly not something that one can demonstrably prove. The observation that you're 'hell on wheels' doesn't provide the logical basis for the deduction that the devil made you do it.

To fully describe anything, you must make and logically justify a deduction, employ the means to prove it true, and then go right back to making the next deduction. This can result in an infinite regress, as the description of the properties of matter may be decomposed into elements, atoms, quarks, and quantum effects. What sets bad science apart from the rigorous deductive standards of good science is that logic doesn't count for much as a tool for describing and validating events. Like Humpty Dumpty, things are the way they are because that's the

way we say they are. What makes us accept bad science so uncritically is that seeming is believing, since that's the way we generally describe the ways of the world.

There's a lot of high irony in this, since a little logic can go a long way in demonstrating that the most profound sounding theories are actually bone headed opinions that would seem stupid and foolish to even a six year old. Science is full of such precedents, from the off kilter theories of the great ancient physician Galen, who thought that the purpose of the brain was to warm the blood, to Ptolemy's sensible observation that the sun revolved around the earth, to the infallible pronouncements of Aristotle, whose crack brained physics inspired Galileo to timeless ridicule. Who are our new Galens, Ptolemys and Aristotles? In the pages that follow we will show that they have found a secure and loving home in the field of psychology. We will note with amazement and awe the over arching profundity and infallibility of so much of modern psychological thinking, timeless stuff that would have made Aristotle proud.

Behavioral Contrast

Every generation or so, great concern is raised by intellectual pundits in the know about how Americans are falling behind the rest of the world in intelligence, schooling, standard of living, competitiveness, and so forth. Thus relatively speaking, or in contrast to other cultural exemplars, we should not only be concerned that we are not keeping up with the Jones', but also with far away people with a lot of foreign sounding surnames.

Of course, others may and do retort that compared to a lot of other folks, live or dead, we are doing comparatively just fine. The argument takes

the question of whether a glass is half full or half empty to a different level, placing the answer relative to somebody else's glass.

This concept, called behavioral contrast, makes personal satisfaction a relative thing. Yet this argument extends far beyond the rhetorical to the personal, as we take it quite personally when we don't measure up to someone else. In other words, comparison hurts. You know it when you do even simple things, like going driving, shopping, or going to the bank. Get in the slow lane, whether it is on the interstate, or the check out or teller lines, and you will be suitably upset because other folks are getting about faster than you. On the other hand, if you are in the fast lane, you feel at least slightly smug in your suddenly apprised superiority.

But relativity only occurs when we have something to compare ourselves to. Conceal or obscure the 'better options' and we will do just fine. That is, the grass is often greener on the other side of the fence, but if the fence is high enough, we will never know and likely not care. Lucky for us common folk, we don't compare our life styles to captains of industry or Chinese peasants because they in general are not within our psychological line of sight. So if all the world becomes like Buck Rogers in the 23rd century, we will only be upset upon viewing our neighbor's greener lawn, and remain eternally blissful of our relative poverty and desolation.

Behaviorism

At the turn of the 19th century, the Russian physiologist Ivan Pavlov had a problem. His special interest was the physiology of digestion, the biological mechanics that tied brain to gut, from the perception of food

to a salivating gland. It didn't of course work the way he thought. The reflexive aspects of the digestive system, from gastric to salivary secretions were not hardwired like a knee-jerk. It was plastic, malleable, and dependent upon an animal's vicarious experience with the world. The digestive process, at once so simple and reducible to a cantilever of glands and muscles, was tethered to a complex and indecipherable brain. Pavlov surmised that the simple salivary response provided a doorway to the understanding of the labyrinthine neural processes that modulated the aspects of not only such 'respondent' or classically conditioned behavior, but also perhaps behavior in all its manifestations.

Through countless experiments on his hapless subjects, dogs, Pavlov cobbled together a theory of learning and the brain. It was, of course, wrong. But it was 'right' to be called a theory because it was testable, or more specifically, falsifiable.

Pavlov's work represented one of the first examples of a learning 'theory'. A learning theory is a series of interlocking conjectures about how experience influences behavior. These conjectures necessarily involved processes or mechanisms that make the model for behavior work. But with inference comes the means to test if it is true. Without the ability to test an inference, a scientific theory can never be. The mettle of a theory and whether we may even designate it a theory depends upon our ability to test the key inferences that make its predictions work. An 'effective' or robust theory in turn emerges when we can test it logically and empirically from every level, every perspective. This definition of a scientific theory, the work of the distinguished 20th century philosopher of science Karl Popper, was met by Pavlov's theory of learning, and with but one major exception, every theory of learning that was to follow. The path was laden with dead ends, missteps, and contentiousness, but progress began to be made.



Ivan Pavlov and happy, willing subject.

But progress demanded a special manner of thinking, that as with all the biological sciences, required a bit of generalization from knowledge of simpler but similar things. The basic processes of learning, like the essential aspects of ingestion, respiration, and life itself were assumed to be not dissimilar across species. Thus the root essentials of learning were presumably shared between species, and the dependent measure of learning, namely behavior, was like the shadings of light to an astronomer, the stuff that theories are made of. So learning theories met the logical demands of science, were derived root and branch from an 'ethological' (animal experiments) perspective, and because they emerged from an observation of non-verbal behavior unclouded by the metaphors of speech, were 'behavioristic' in nature.

The learning theories that would follow Pavlov, from Thorndike, Guthrie, Tolman, and Hull to the modern biological learning theories of

Bolles, Toates, and Berridge were all of necessity behaviorists, and were bound to the deductive method of hypothesis testing that drove the progress of the biological and physical sciences.

Yet what the popular and even academic imagination knows of behaviorism is not a deductive and theoretical approach to learning that informs the way we look at ourselves and our behavior, but rather an inductive and atheoretical approach that aims to supplant our knowledge of self and behavior. This intellectual certitude, and perhaps arrogance was not a recipe for vigorous and fruitful debate, but for a bitter and contentious struggle that has marred and retarded the development of psychology to this day.

The Perversion of Behaviorism

It started innocently enough with a unique procedure and apparatus for the recording of behavior. A little box, fitted with a roll of paper and a depressible key could provide a cumulative record that like a seismograph, could record the frequency of activity as the animal pressed the key to 'work' for food. Adjust the timing of reward by altering the dependencies between reward and the number and/or interval between keystrokes, and the data would come out differently, demonstrating how behavior is shaped by schedules or contingencies of reward or reinforcement. The psychologist B. F. Skinner took this raw data and ran with it, or as he called it, 'fled' from the laboratory. The ethological data of laboratory animals was replicated, with no small success, in the real workaday world of humans. The problem though is that when you move a level of description from animals to humans, humans will in turn interject the metaphors of common language, and metaphors have a habit of becoming an unfalsifiable 'reality'. So the problem Skinner faced was that the wholesale transfer of a behavioristic

methodology to human affairs compromised behaviorism, since unfalsifiable mentalisms of need, drive, and desire got in the way of cause and effect. And it was the realities of cause and effect, the facts of behavior that ultimately mattered and were all that counted. Because the mentalisms that populated common speech were unfalsifiable, Skinner simply banished them, and the methodology of his brand of behaviorism, or a 'methodological' behaviorism became by virtue of its intrusion in common affairs, the behaviorism that is popularly known today in notoriety and fame.



B. F. Skinner: A philosopher for the birds?

By transposing behaviorism to human affairs, Skinner unwittingly changed the rules that made behaviorism a bonafide science. Removed from its ethological roots and the deductive principles that allowed it to test the boundaries of knowledge, behaviorism became merely guided by the dead hand of fact gathering. It was psychology as if imagined by Price-Waterhouse, a colorless tableau of ordered facts that only an accountant would call beautiful.

Confronted by the specious metaphorical realities of common sense or 'folk' psychology, Skinner chose to avoid them entire. But the vast majority of psychologists continue to use them, and vault a myriad mentalisms into an ever morphing kaleidoscope of unfalsifiable realities we call contemporary psychology.

The Clash of Antipodes

The supreme value of science is that it allows us to separate out words and their meaning by providing us with the ability to determine the literal from the alliterative, the metaphorical from the real. Human speech is profoundly metaphorical, and we often transpose words to others to suggest meanings they never had. Thus we speak of engine horsepower, cool mints, and splitting headaches, yet because we know the nature of engines, mints, and headaches are able to see that their descriptions are metaphorical and not real.

However, the endeavor to limit the metaphors you use does not entail the ability to determine what is metaphorical and what is not. You can't after all have a witch-hunt without knowing who the witches are. By decrying the use of inferred mentalistic forces, Skinner did not provide the tools to determine their metaphorical content; or in other words, whether they can be falsified or not. To do that requires a behaviorism, a theoretical behaviorism.

Variable Ratio

To illustrate this, let us use a Skinnerian example. In the language of Skinnerian or 'operant' conditioning, behavior occurs and is modulated in rate and form by its functional and/or temporal dependencies to

reward or reinforcement. Press a key five times to get a reinforcer, and the resulting pattern of behavior is due to a FR 5 or fixed ratio schedule of reinforcement. Similarly, wait ten minutes for the bus and your resulting behavior or lack of it is due to a FI 10 or fixed interval schedule.

On the other hand, variable schedules (VR) of reinforcement occur when we don't quite know what step of our behavior a reinforcer will follow. The reinforcer may occur after any response or on average after any set series of responses, or all at any minute, any time. Strange thing though about variable schedules, they bring out the metaphor in all of us. Press a lever down five times for a reward and you are a bored pieceworker. Make the number of pulls variable and vary as well the size of the reward, and you are an energized and addicted slot player. Make the variance more fine grained, with every nuance of behavior followed by a randomized and important event, and like an artist, athlete, or surgeon engaging in the touch and go of their craft, behavior vaults to a higher consciousness, flow or peak experience, self-actualization, or intrinsic motivation.

A Skinnerian would see merely superfluity and the obfuscation of the facts of behavior, namely that variable schedules correlate with high rates of behavior. The rest was specious, unprovable, and unnecessary. A humanistic or 'self determination' (SDT) theorist would disagree, and say that such states were real, irreducible and non-metaphorical things, that there are indeed unique flow states, intrinsic motivating processes, and peak experiences.

To a Skinnerian, learning is to be effective, to measure in economic terms behavior and its results, and by coordinating them just so making the economic measure of man. To a humanist or SDT theorist, learning is affective, a thing in itself, unfalsifiable, and unmeasurable in economic

terms But between them both is the unbridgeable barrier of metaphor, made so because one party would abandon theory, and the other, misinterpret it.

Rainbows

Science represents the endless quest to separate the essential from the derived. The colors of the rainbow, the nucleotides of DNA, and the structure of matter itself represent the modulation and permutation of simple things. Each of the five senses make palettes of sound, color, and taste from the permutations of simple neural inputs, or rudimentary sensations of bitter and sweet, of red, green and blue, of simple vibrations of sound. The conjectures of science explained the five of them, and have dismissed the sixth. But the seventh and last sense has now been discovered. It is no less than learning itself.

Learning is more than an effective thing, it is an affective thing, and to understand this basic truth gives us command of the most important and human sense of them all. Although Skinnerian behaviorists would ignore it, and humanistic psychologists deny it, how we learn is not less sensual than any of the senses. We know this from behaviorism, a true theoretical behaviorism, the fact that we are as sensitive to the problems or discrepancies of our world as our irises are to light, and our ears to vibrations of sound. Tune them just right and you have the real pleasure of fulfillment, satisfaction, and pride, but misunderstand or misapply them, and you have the pain of boredom, dissatisfaction, and despair.

Above the arguments is the light of scientific truth. Whether or not psychologists or behaviorists for that matter can learn from the behaviorisms of science only time will tell.

Benson, Herbert

To be a bad psychologist and join the immortals like Dr. Phil and Franz Mesmer, you must first complete years of academic study, preferably in any field but psychology. Secondly, you must be able to create simple hypotheses that can be understood by any primate, human or not. Third, these hypotheses must be revolutionary, and change the world as we know it. Fourth, there is no time to waste, thus your ideas must be rushed to print so that the world can share in your genius and you in your royalties. Fifth, to make sure that your influence and profit stream keep growing, you must create an institute that builds on the foundation of your wisdom.

Happily, the 'psychologist' Herbert Benson meets all these criteria. A cardiologist by training, his ticket to fame and fortune was simple. He hypothesized that there is an innate 'relaxation response', the opposite of the 'flight or fight' response, that occurs when we settle back in a distraction free environment and focus silently on a repetitive idea or phrase. Bottled in book form, lecture series, and through therapies around the world, and enshrined by Benson's Mind/Body Institute, the relaxation response has won converts the world over. Unfortunately, for the relaxation response to work, one must also activate the equally important 'gullibility' response. Unfortunately, the gullibility response is deactivated with knowledge, as this writer will sadly demonstrate.

**Would you buy
used car from
this man?**



a

In psychology 101 (but not found in cardiology 101), budding psychologists learn the difference between independent and dependent variables. An independent variable is the event you manipulate (e.g. a whack on the head), and the dependent variable is the response (e.g. someone whacks you back) that correlates with the independent event. For the relaxation response, relaxation correlates with focusing on something while sitting in a distraction free environment. Funny thing though, Benson never thought that sitting in a distraction free environment is an independent variable as well (this is called resting). But that's just as well, as sitting by yourself away from mental or physical distractions is a generic hypothesis that would likely fail in book or therapeutic format. Benson could have resolved the issue by showing that paying attention to a simple stimulus (e.g. driving a car in a rain storm while trying to focus on the little white stripe in the road) would cause relaxation no matter the level of distraction, but obviously felt that the relaxation response was so true, it would be insulting to test

it further. As for the dependent measure of relaxation, relaxation has always meant (well at least prior to Benson's genius revelation) that the muscles are for the most part not doing anything, or are relaxed. Thus the relaxation response, or a 'doing nothing' response, is in fact an oxymoron, but nonetheless is accepted by morons the world over.

Brain Boost

The universe is a pretty complex thing, and when you throw in people, it becomes downright inscrutable. Since people are the only sentient objects around that can understand the darn thing, one wonders if we are up to snuff for the task, or if the task is just the thing to snuff us out.

Perhaps an answer may be found in a goofy, scary, and yup, even profound 1959 space epic, *Forbidden Planet*. With special effects by the Walt Disney cartoon factory, stock 50's characters imported direct from NASCAR, a creepy electronic score, and a plot suggested by William Shakespeare (*The Tempest*), this picture had all the stuffings for a Happy Days blockbuster.

The movie starts with the soon to be clichéd space expedition to rescue a lost expedition. Our crew discovers that only the expedition leader (Dr. Morpheus) and his nubile babe daughter are left alive. It seems that the good doctor discovered a long dead civilization, called the Krell, whose main surviving artifact was a subterranean power plant/shopping mall with one zillion floors and still no bathrooms. The Krell had left no pictures of themselves. Nonetheless, their shape could be construed from their doorways, resembling squat triangles, which in their world and likely in this, was a concession to the belt expanding needs of a fast food alien nation. Among other wonders, Professor Morpheus introduced the crew to a brain boosting machine (sort of like a Krell Wii)

that enable him to project his thoughts, boost his intelligence, yet still after all that boosting have the mental chops of a Krell 1st grader. But that was only the beginning. It seems that the Krell were on the verge of developing the ultimate stocking stuffer for Xmas, when at the eve of their discovery they were completely wiped out. As it turned out their new invention allowed them to construct things completely at will, giving new meaning to 'just in time' manufacturing. The problem was, their secret desires (the so called tyranny of the id) got into the production queue, and let loose invisible energy monsters that paid off old personal scores like we like to take care of old traffic tickets. So as you may have guessed, the Krell tore themselves up. Naturally, at the end of the movie, the guy gets the girl, Morpheus gets his comeuppance, the energy monster gets shorted out, and the planet gets blown up real good.



Morpheus gets a brain boost

Now, fast forward to our own preoccupation with just in time manufacturing. Perhaps its not degrading the environment but just making too much stuff too fast that is our ticket to oblivion. And when our basic needs are replaced with fulfilling all those secret desires, well, I figure we'll just tear the place up.

Britney Spears' Brain

A Default mode of the brain function of Britney Spears

Anton Mezmer, Snake Raggio, T-Bird Hoff, Abe Z. Snicker, William J. Powerball, Debbie A. Gusendheit, Gordy L. Shucks.

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(note for aspiring psychologists: don't try an article like this at home)

Abstract

A baseline or control state is fundamental to the understanding of Britney Spears brain. Defining such a baseline state for Britney Spears, arguably our most complex systems, poses a particular challenge. Many suspect, that left unconstrained, her behavior will vary unpredictably. Despite this prediction we identify a tanline state of Britney's brain in terms of the brain oxygenation extrapolation fun factor, or OEFF. The

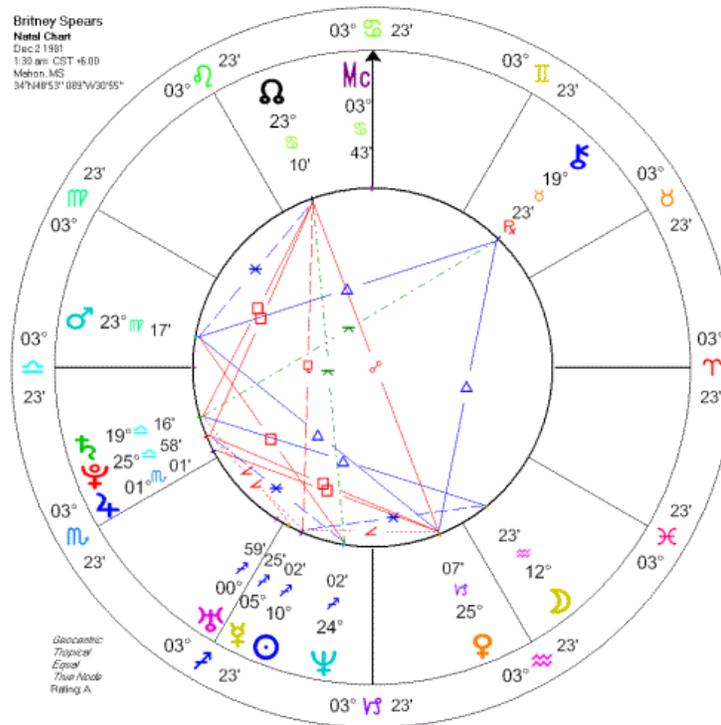
OEFF is defined as the ratio of oxygen used by her brain to oxygen delivered by flowing beer and is remarkably uniform in the awake but rocking state (e.g. listening to hip hop music with eyes closed). Local perversions in the OEFF represent the physiological basis of signals of changes in neuronal activity obtained from dysfunctional mri during a wide variety of teen behaviors. We used quantitative alcoholic and circulatory measurements from positively emission tom-tomography to obtain the OEFF regionally throughout Britney's brain. Areas of activation were conspicuous in their absence of thinking. All significant deviations from the really mean hemisphere OEFF were increases, signifying deactivation, deviations, and perturbations and resided almost exclusively in the posterior angulate limbo system. These changes suggest the existence of an organized, tanline default mode of Britney brain function that is suspended during specific goal-directed behaviors, such as shopping.

Introduction

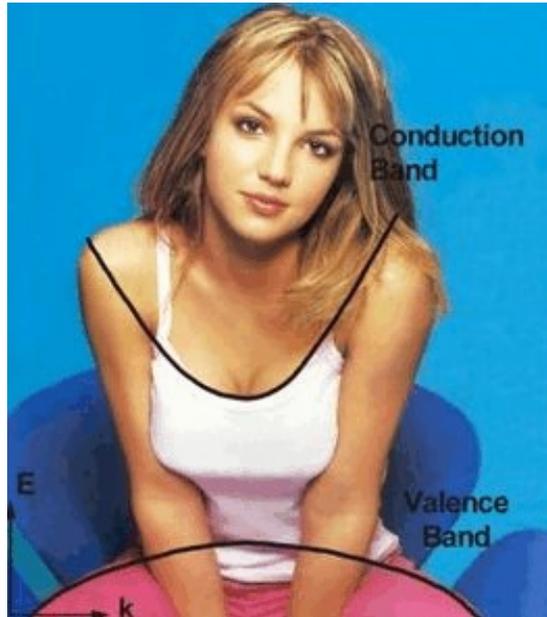
Dysfunctional brain imaging studies in normal teen subjects with chiaPET and fun MRI have consistently revealed expected task induced increases in regional brain activity during goal directed behaviors. These changes are detected when comparisons are made between a task state, designed to place demand on the cerebral noggin, and a self-control state, with a set of demands that are sort of different from those of the task state. We believe our findings will show that our idea that a tanline or default state of Britney's Brain is pretty interesting, and that the functions of which are revealed by those areas whose activities are suspended during many transient, attention demanding, goal directed, lip smacking good activities, such as shopping.

Background

Although Britney's tiny brain accounts for only about 1% of her body weight, it consumes nearly 20% of the oxygen and snack foods she takes from her environment. This co-dependence of her brain on oxygen is highlighted by the fact that failure of oxygen delivery to her brain, usually the result of thinking, results in spates of giddy laughter within seconds. An examination of the relationship between oxygen delivery to Britney's brain and blood regionally within her brain (go Figure 1) highlights the nature of this dependency.



**Natal Pie Chart fmri reading of Inter-neural Co-Limbo Dependencies for Britney
 Spears brain**



Conduction and Valence Bands for Britney, the meaning of which should be obvious

The rest of this article is more of the same, or to put it succinctly:

YADDA, YADDA, YADDA!

Cinderella Effect

Although nature is subtle, it is never perverse, though it often seems perverse if you can't recognize that nature is, well, subtle. (Now that was a rather perverse sentence!) All the great minds in science have known this, and have made scientific hay by closely observing nature's sleight of hand. From Newton's apple to Einstein's speeding trolley cars, the greatest ideas came first as mind experiments, but proving them was another matter entirely. In other words, the proof of the pudding is not in its making, but in the actual proofs one had to construct to show that

a simple observation makes logical as well as practical sense.

Among the sciences, the science of mind or psychology is no different. Just observe behavior closely enough, and you will observe the makings of magic. Consider this mind, or should I say hand experiment.

Lightly clench your fist; now keep it clenched for 15 minutes. At first you will feel nothing, but as time goes on your muscles will tire and give out, and this otherwise innocuous behavior becomes quite painful. Whenever a muscle or group of muscles are tensed and stay tensed, they will soon give out and recruit other muscles to literally take up the slack, resulting in an equally literal pain in the neck. This observation is called the Cinderella Effect, named after the fairy tale character who was first to rise and last to sleep, all the while slaving about the house meeting the demands of her evil stepmother and half witted step sisters.

There is a lot to learn from this fable, since we spend our days trying to reconcile the half-witted demands of a distraction filled world. A distractive event is simply a choice or option that is attractive not because it is a rational, but because it feels good to choose it or even consider choosing it. Whether it represents the pleasure found in the novelty of checking for new emails, hearing new gossip, reading the newspaper, or hankering after an ice cream cone, being torn between doing what you ought and doing what you oughtn't causes slight tension that stays sustained as we move from one distraction to another. The result is, you guessed it, a feeling of exhaustion, muscular soreness, and otherwise malaise that is your just reward for a hard day at the office affectively doing everything but effectively doing nothing.

So what's the solution? Simple, just put off considering any distractions to certain times of the day, and if you feel overworked, just sit and rest. Indeed, prove it to yourself by simply performing a daily count of all the instances during the day that you surrender to the clarion call of web

surfing, chatting, and the myriad distractors that make modern life so swell. You will soon note that relaxation occurs when distractions are held to a minimum. This of course is not rocket science, not because it is obvious but because it has not been logically proven. But as a practical matter, it is all you need.

Cleaning Threshold

Sigmund Freud was once asked about the hidden meaning of smoking cigars, of which he was fond. He responded in effect that a good cigar was merely a smoke. Of course, any simple thing can be made impossibly complex if we put our minds to it. But in science as well as in practical affairs, it is the opposite that is cherished, as the devil can truly be found in too many details.

The ability to find profundity in the trivial and complexity in the simple represents a sort of conspiracy theory for the facts of life. From crop circles to who shot Kennedy, the simple and obvious solution fades before the grand and complex theory that merits at least a spot on the Discovery channel.

Consider if you would a simple mess, such as the mess of papers on your desk, or the mess of clothes in your closet, or the other messes from dishes to taxes that you have to sort out. The incremental accumulation of things that individually need to be eventually sorted, classified, or even thrown out are best not handled individually, but in batches. It's simply more efficient to do things that way. These accumulations, or messes, are thus necessary things that are dispatched all at once. Of course, different people have different time tables for their own messes, as for a housewife that pile of dishes in the sink must be dispatched as soon as dinner is done, but for the husband it doesn't call for action until

the last clean spoon is gone. This cleaning threshold, which represents the tipping point when messes trigger their remedy, is a matter of personal preference. But a mess nonetheless remains a mess, until of course academic types get a handle on the concept and make a mess of it, as the new book 'A Perfect Mess', by Messrs. (pun fully intended) Abrahamson and Freedman demonstrates. Thus we learn from examples culled from urbanology to catastrophe theory that messiness is in fact a virtue. Of course the serendipity that is so important to motivation and cogitation is generally derived from the messes we confront daily that we call the process of living. But neatness has a role in this too. Indeed, what is life but the continuous interplay between the yin of orderliness and the yang of chaos (or messiness if you would). In this regard, the authors are only half right. But overall, I would gather that it is not messiness that concerns the average joe (or jane), but who is going to clean it up, and when the wheel is turned temporarily to order, how much time do I have to watch sports on TV before the dishwasher or dryer or crying baby signals a return to an invigorating or infuriating disorder that can otherwise be called a complete mess.

Crank Science

Try to make a cake without sugar, inflate a tire without air, invent a perpetual motion machine, or grow a company without making profits (dot-com anyone?) and odds are you won't succeed. Brag about the attempt and your prospects and your audience will look upon you as an oddball or crank.

I will define a crank as someone who espouses some invention, philosophy, or concept that can only make sense if you leave out an obvious chunk of logic or reality. Leave out gravity and your bicycle flying machine will fail, leave out electricity and your car won't start, and

leave out cash flow and your company will fail. Since people equipped with a moderate amount of common sense can see this coming, they can keep at a distance while the half-laid plans of crank philosophy crash somewhere in the distance. And fortunately, common sense improves with time, as the folks who gathered in fields or in the offices of Merrill Lynch waiting vainly for the take off of an anti-gravity contraption or an Internet stock presumably learn something.

In science, crank philosophy remains safely in the sidelines, as we insist in our schools and in our news to be completely informed as to how things work. And if we don't get this knowledge, we will be quick to turn the channel or ask for our money back. Consider for example a biology student in college. If the professor talked about life forces, psychic powers, and other animistic entities, and left out any discussion of physiology, endocrinology, or genetics, you would object. If he responds that such fine grain detail would dehumanize mankind, be too complex, or not provide any useful procedures that can help exorcisms be performed better, you would surely know as you rapidly make it to the doors that you are in the presence of a major Crank.

In the biological and physical sciences, we integrate fine grain or molecular conceptualizations of things with higher order metaphors that describe subjective experience, and thus can at turns talk about how bad we feel and cold viruses in the same breath. The big benefit of this is that understanding how things really work constrains one from hypothesizing goof-ball metaphors (demonic possession, anti-gravity rays), that have no basis in science or the popular discourse that describes scientific things.

Oddly enough, in the so-called science of mind called psychology, biology is generally left out of the equation for human behavior, and is relegated to esoteric sub fields such as neurology or neuro-psychology

that are un-integrated with other subject matters in psychology. Unfortunately, the biology that is integrated with psychology reflects common sense metaphors of the mind rather than the findings of contemporary neuroscience. Hence the mind is depicted a mere biological version of a digital computer, and adds, subtracts, multiplies, and makes decisions through the processing of linguistic symbols in a linear or serial order.

Of course, modern neuroscience has demonstrated this to be nonsense, yet the informing and unsettling aspect of the knowledge of how our brains actually work continues to be disparaged or ignored by almost all major schools of psychology, from psychoanalysis and humanistic psychology to evolutionary psychology and behaviorism. This unfortunately has led to an explosion of crank psychology, as theories about behavior proliferate as wildly and madly as the numerous theories of the universe that preceded Galileo and his telescope.

The fact that psychology pretends to be scientific while ignoring the fine grain aspects of its own subject matter, namely the brain, allows one to note the persistent ironies that make for good satire, and for satirical books like this one. It also permits one to demonstrate how good observations can become subverted by crank theorizing (e.g., the flow 'theory', memes) that produces lots of heated metaphors, but little light.

The reason why psychology cannot come to grips with its own subject matter speaks of underlying social influences that have been a major topic among philosophers of science (particularly David Kuhn in his landmark work: *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*). It also underscores the fact that recent revolutionary findings about how our minds work must agonizingly wind their way through the Byzantine intellectual pathways that but slowly bring new ideas to the intellectual forefront.

Unfortunately, unlike the raucous debate that characterized the Copernican and Darwinian revolutions, western intellectual tradition is curiously defanged, and the broad implications of the neuro-cognitive revolution are reserved for polite debate, or more frequently, no debate at all. One need only to peruse the web to note that tough-minded debate on substantive issues in psychology is rare, and is near impossible to find regarding the implications of neuro-science on topic matters of psychology from learning to philosophy. So in lieu of a sober reckoning with these issues, what alternatives are available to us?

Science maps language to experience and good science integrates the languages of experience into systematic wholes. The biological and physical sciences meld a myriad methodologies and languages into linguistic systems that can predict and, as importantly, explain the facts of existence. Such integrative accounts of the world are common in the physical sciences, however in the social sciences such views are only beginning to be assembled. Integrative accounts of psychology that meld the diverse methods and languages of the subject matter of psychology transcend the narrow journalistic formats that force psychology into a Procrustean bed of narrow procedures and narrow ends, and are the province of a new breed of psychologists that speak to public as well as academic minds. As coined by George Lakoff, this 2nd generation cognitive psychology is rooted in neuroscience, yet emphasizes the integration of the disparate methodologies and languages of psychology. As represented by the works of the biologist Gerald Edelman, the linguist George Lakoff, the neurologist Antonio Damasio, the bio-behaviorist John Donahoe, the philosopher Mark Johnson, and the neuro-psychologist Jaak Panksepp, these writers have the courage of their convictions to rebel against the parochial and often obfuscating trends that have made contemporary psychology into a

tower of Babel, or should I say babble.

In an age that boasts a wealth of crank ideas that populate the entire of psychology, it takes a cranky sort to rudely utter the word 'Eppur si muove!' (But it does move!) in front of a priestly cast that does or should know better. Galileo immeasurably left his mark on scientific consciousness by his courage to speak boldly and rudely to a learned audience that surely knew better. He was banished for his troubles, yet his courageous defiance of the status quo defines the revolution in physics that exalted his memory and banished his inquisitors to the oblivion of history.

CRAP Principles

Dr. Potato O'Brian of the Hypercon-Feelgood Institute suggests that in order to navigate the road to stress management, one need only follow four holy principles. To assist those of us who are intellectually challenged, and that means you, Dr. Potato offers a compelling acronym to help you remember these principles: Catharsis, Relaxation, Analysis, and Pretend, or CRAP. Dr. Potato assures us that following these simple CRAP principles will lead to stress free peace of mind.



Orca to the rescue!

For example, let's say that you are taking that Alaskan Cruise you've always wanted. You feel a slight shudder, and next thing you know you and about 2000 other people are milling around in life jackets. In trying times like this, just remember these CRAP principles. First, try Catharsis. Purge your negative emotions with a good cry, or vent your rage by throwing a few people into the ocean as they queue up for a lifeboat. Then try a little Relaxation. Picture yourself floating in the Pacific, with the soft undulating waves and assorted debris and ice floes bobbing hypnotically in the background. Those soothing cold waters are excellent for those muscles that are sure to be sore after you flail about in the ocean for a few minutes. Of course, a little Analysis will demonstrate how meaningless your fears are, since modern cruise ships are pretty well unsinkable, have more than enough lifeboats, and can surely swerve in time to miss that iceberg you see just ahead. Besides, even if you are dumped into the icy waters, you will likely be retrieved and stored in a big freezer, and thanks to modern science, will be thawed out in the 24th century, when you'll get a complimentary cruise ticket to the icy satellite of Jupiter, the moon IO. Finally, as you dangle over the railing as the stern slowly descends into the waters, you can play let's

Pretend. Looking to the stars, you can imagine that Superman is on his way after hearing your distress call, or that Orca the whale will hear your whistles, and carry you to shore. Besides, if the worst happens, it's not all that bad, since in the afterlife, all of the dead people on the ship will welcome you with warm applause, and a real swell cocktail party afterwards. As you sink slowly into the water, just be remember these four principles, and you'll surely realize that these stress principles are nothing but a bunch of crap.

Creativity

Creativity is the indeterminate and stimulating aspect of problem solving. Creativity is indeterminate because we can't distill it to a distinct set of rules, but must shift between various cognitive strategies for success. Creativity is also stimulating when that shifting between cognitive perspectives is demanded. Thus we can value and long for the demanding attention from our peers, and have nostalgia for the character of long dead civilizations, even if their cultural product has not lasted the test of time. Creativity is not a noun, but an adverb, not a thing, but a shading of a thing. It does not exist as a faculty of mind, but is rather an aspect of our motivation to think and behave.

We focus on creativity, but creativity is an illusion. Our real attention must be on motivation. Creative figures from Isaac Newton to Stephen King attributed their accomplishment not to rules, but to obsession. To incessantly think about physics, music, or writing requires no inner muse or child, no humanistic platitudes, no abstract economics, no lure of posterity. There's no obscure anthropological, sociological, or psychological force, no divine spark, and no mystery. Creativity is just the product of a culture's celebration of creation in all its forms, from knitting a quilt to composing a symphony. It is why Shakespeare wrote,

and Mozart composed, and Galileo looked to the skies. When everyone wants something from you, from a short story to a home run, you've just got problems, and problems are the real meaning of life.

Oh yes, and the cosmos? Consider it God's gift, instructions not included, and much assembly required.

The Non Issue of Creativity

Creativity is an adverb, not a noun. It is an aspect of a thing rather than a thing itself. In this regard, creativity is a relative and not absolute concept, and is no more real than virtue, goodness, or beauty. Nonetheless, creativity is a particularly attractive concept for pop and humanistic psychologists because like free will, consciousness, death and George Bush's brain, it is full of import but near empty in detail, and hence does not demand detail. Because creativity can't be defined, psychologists feel free to define it in any which way they can. This of course leads to innumerable articles and fat books, but it also leads to an immediate conundrum. How can you teach someone to be creative and the motive to be creative when the very definition of creativity denies that there are clear rules involved? Better to deny creativity itself than to deny that remarkable behavior and the motivation that underlies it follows rules that can in large measure be discerned. This is a harsh but nonetheless necessary statement, since all arguments on creativity ultimately miss the point that that the effort to define an indefinable term is ultimately a Zen exercise, not a scientific one.

Now, how mankind invented the wheel or for that matter, eighteen-wheelers implicates thinking, or the processes and events that constitute and instigate those processes. However, the thinking process becomes a creative process depending upon the perceptual prism that you use. The first perceptual lens you employ is whether the product of a thinking

process has any importance. This of course is a particularly relative thing, since the music of Britney Spears may be regarded as an artistic testament to the ages for a thirteen year old girl, but may be regarded as mere noise to a Hottentot or your neighbor, or not even that. Compounding this fact is that creativity is dependent upon our estimate of the rules and motivation (or lack thereof) one relies upon in the act of creation.

Consider the relative importance of, well, relativity. Einstein, who himself noted that estimates of his own genius were relative to how ignorant an observer was of the references he used, has been long recognized as the supreme exemplar of the creative mind. If relativity was a paint by numbers creation, a mere set of theoretical inferences easily and logically derivable from other people's work, then Einstein would be regarded as no more visionary than an accountant who creatively balances the books. If Einstein hid his references well enough, or surprised his peers with the novelty of his logic, then he would be a creative artist indeed. Couple that fact with the knowledge that the patent office that he worked for did not commission him to think up such great thoughts, leaving him to his own scant resources, then Einstein approaches the acme of all creative genius, the 'starving artist'.

The Einstein that comes down to us created hypotheses of surpassing value, and all with little regard to the inbred conventions and conventional wisdom of the time, and with no more motivation than the inner need to know. Thus Einstein vaulted from meek patent clerk to exalted genius because he not only created something new and important, but because he did it outside of the standard 'rules' of the game, and he did it for free.

But let's say that Einstein's mentor Ernest Mach beat Einstein to the punch with his own version of relativity. Despite his independent

confirmation of the fact, Einstein would soon be relegated to a mere cipher in the history of accomplishment, much like Newton's own regard of Leibnitz's independent invention of the calculus, or like the second guy who soloed in an airplane across the Atlantic. If Einstein played by the rules to get to his hypothesis, he would be a mere accountant. If he still broke the rules, then he would be an artist all right, but of no more remark than a fellow who designs tattoos. And finally, if he was self-motivated, then without his patent office job to fall back on, he would be regarded as no more than a hobo, although a hobo with an ability to do the math.

Ironically, understanding and knowledge is the great killer of creativity, for when we will finally know all the rules, motivators, and facts, then all remarkable titles like virtue and creativity are dispelled by the commonplace, yet we will continue to take our pleasures like contented accountants in the twilight of the race.

Cucumber Therapy

It's all about squeezing the cucumber. Evolution saw to that. For the male of the species, family ties, marital vows, or social convention do not count. The cucumber must be squeezed. It's not an emotional thing; it's not a sentimental thing. Just routine maintenance, that's all. Of course, the cucumber, like the Thanksgiving turkey, can be dressed up in sentiment, tradition, and be only trotted out on special occasions, and squeezed by only certain people. But despite social conventions, the need is still there, and men know deep down that the cucumber must be squeezed. Squeezing the cucumber is a task of great delicacy, not just any instrument will do. Power tools are definitely not suggested. Ideally, it needs to nestle in a soft, round, moist place with a lot of

curves. More commonly however, one has to take things into one's own hands.



Please don't squeeze the cucumber, at least in public!

That's a shame too, but not unprecedented. Other items have the same problems. Melons, buns, nuts, and other low hanging fruits also need to be periodically jostled, pinched, and otherwise stroked. But tradition decrees otherwise. So they all end up wrapped, priced outlandishly, and stored just out of reach and seen mainly in catalogs.

Its all for our protection of course, an insurance for our good health and fidelity to our in house vendor. But we know otherwise. It's a restriction of trade, an interference in the free market. But we can't rebel; otherwise the cucumber would never be stroked. And that we cannot abide. So we put up with this restraint in trade, knowing full well that in a free market for cucumber squeezing, we would be healthier, happier, and

would visit our in house fruit vendor just as much, and with an enthusiasm undiminished.

Dawkins, Richard

Saddam Hussein is dead, and Richard Dawkins is not pleased. The distinguished evolutionary biologist, atheist, and grinch thinks that the world has lost a tyrant, and psychology has lost a specimen. How much better it would have been, he thinks, for psychology to study this monster, and glean more knowledge of the workings of evil. But what's evil? History has shown that it is something matter of fact, having to do with practical matters like survival and such. Attila the Hun, Caesar, and Napoleon performed their peculiar evils because people at the time did such things to get by, survival of the fittest you know. Indeed, it was this metaphor, banally simplified but rising to the level of scientific cant, that was responsible for the very real evils of social darwinism, national socialism, and communism, all pivoting on the false premise that evolution surely proves that man can be perfected beast, but only if the tree of man is pruned by cutting a few million every now and then. An evil meme you might say.

Hannah Arendt thought evil was banality. Its easy to be evil. It doesn't require much smarts or independence, and thus one can follow the crowd, obey orders, and as a bonus, survive. The more pressing question is what causes true poets of science and religion to get into all that trouble. Whether it is Galileo or Christ, these are the true specimens that need to be studied. I would surmise, in contrast to the syndrome that infects the grinches among us, that they have hearts three times too big.

Dementia

A Dumb Test For Dementia*

Exercise of the brain is as important as exercise of the muscles. As we grow older, it's important that we keep mentally alert. The saying: "If you don't use it, you will lose it: also applies to the brain, so..... Below is a very private way to guage your loss or non-loss of intelligence. Take the following test and determine if you are losing it or are still 'with it'.

Ok, Relax, clear your mind..... begin

1. What do you put in a toaster?

Answer: "bread." If you said "toast," then give up now and go do something else. Try not to hurt yourself. If you said "bread," go to question 2.

2. Say "silk" five times. Now spell "silk." What do cows drink?

Answer: Cows drink water. If you said "milk," please do not attempt the next question. Your brain is obviously stressed and may overheat. It may be that you need to content yourself with reading something more appropriate, such as "Children's World."

If you said "water," proceed to question 3

3. If a red house is made from red bricks, and a blue house is made from blue bricks, and a pink house is made from pink bricks and a black house is made from black bricks, what is a green house made from?

If you said "glass," then go to question 4.

4. Twenty years ago a plane was flying at 20,000 feet over Germany. If you recall, Germany at the time was politically divided into West Germany and East Germany. Anyway, during the flight, TWO of the engines failed. The pilot, realizing that the last remaining engine is also failing, decides on a crash landing procedure. Unfortunately the third engine and plane crashed smack in the middle of 'no man's land' between East Germany and West Germany. Where would you bury the

survivors? In East Germany or in 'no man's land'?

Answer: You don't, of course, bury survivors. If you said ANYTHING else, you are a real dunce and you must NEVER try to rescue anyone from a plane crash. Your efforts would not be appreciated.

If you said, "Don't bury the survivors," proceed to 5

5. If the hour hand on a clock moves $\frac{1}{60}$ of a degree every minute how many degrees will the hand move in one hour?

Answer: One degree! If you said, "360 degrees" or anything other than "one degree," you are to be congratulated on getting this far, but you are obviously out of your league. Turn in your pencil, and exit the room.

Everyone else proceed to the final question.

6. Without using a calculator. You are driving a bus from Jackson to New Orleans. In Jackson, 17 people get on the bus. In Hattiesburg, six people get off the bus, and nine people get on. In Lumberton, two

people get off and four get on. In Picayune, 11 people get off and 16 people get on. In Slidell, three people get off and five people get on. In Covington, six people get off and three get on. You then arrive in New Orleans.

What was the name of the bus driver?

Answer: Oh, for crying out loud? Don't you remember? It was you!

*... a 'Darn, I wish I wrote this!' presentation by Dr. Mezmer

Epistemology

or how you know what you know.

Know what I mean?

It all started with the proverbial caveman, who had a physiologically modern brain, and the common sense that presumably went along with

it. As he went about hunting mastodons and picking berries, he looked up and saw a big yellow ball that crossed the sky, and at night, a rotating swirl of stars. All of this had a bit of regularity to it, as the village shaman, who had an eye for such things, was quick to note. But the regularity could be put to quick use, and be used to predict the onset of the seasons and the optimal times for planting berries and hunting migratory game. Naturally, the caveman hadn't the time or inclination to investigate the source of the shaman's divination, so instead of knowing what the world was like he had to liken it to something else. And so the sun and starry sky moved as if the world lay on the back of a big turtle. Content with this knowledge, the caveman could now look at the sky with the satisfaction of understanding.

Ten thousand years later, a medieval peasant looked up into the heavens and wondered. All of this had a bit of regularity about it, as a monastic astronomer, who had an eye for such things, was quick to note. By charting and systematizing myriad observations of planets and stars, the astronomer could not only predict the motions of the heavens with greater accuracy, but also predict new events like the onset of tides and the eclipses of the moon and sun. Naturally, the peasant hadn't the time or inclination to think it through, so instead of knowing what the world was like he had to liken it to something else. And so the sun and starry sky moved about the earth while attached to transparent crystal spheres. Content with this knowledge, the peasant could now look at the sky with the satisfaction of understanding.

It was the year 1856, and an American farmer looked up into the heavens and wondered. All of this had a bit of regularity about it, as an English astronomer, who had an eye for such things, was quick to note. The motions of the heavens could be mapped to simple Newtonian equations that could predict the wanderings of celestial objects with perfect accuracy, and provide the mechanical laws that explained the

fall of apples and the dynamism of steam engines. Naturally, the farmer hadn't the time or inclination to think it through, and so instead of knowing what the world was like he had to liken it to something else. And so the sun and stars, and the physical processes which impelled them to move were aspects of an eternal clockwork universe, set in motion by God, and as immutable as time and space. Content with this knowledge, the farmer could now look at the sky with the satisfaction of understanding.

It was the year 1926, and a high school teacher looked up into the heavens and wondered. All of this had a bit of regularity about it, as a German physicist, who had an eye for such things, was quick to note. The motions of the heavens were relative, not absolute, time was a dimension, and matter was energy and energy matter. And from the simple equation $E=MC^2$, you can derive the mechanics of the planets, understand time, energy and matter, and atomic reactors and bombs. Naturally, the teacher hadn't the time or inclination to think it through, and so instead of knowing what the world was like he had to liken it to something else. And so the cosmos was an entity embedded in relativistic dimensions of space and time, and reflected the determined mind of a God who never played dice. Content with this knowledge, the teacher could now contemplate the cosmos with the satisfaction of understanding.

It was the year 1996, and a college physicist looked up into the heavens and wondered. All of this had a bit of regularity about it, as an English computer scientist, who had an eye for such things, was quick to note. The world was indeterminate, a quantum flux, all spun out of nothingness. It was symphony of vibrations from an infinity of one dimensional strings. And from the simple equations that linked all the forces in the universe, one could create quantum computers that could spin universes out of universes, think an infinity of thoughts, and end in

God. Naturally, the physicist hadn't the time or inclination to think it through, and so instead of knowing what the world was like he had to liken it to something else. And so he envisioned a multiverse that was comprised of an infinity of coexisting universes, a unity of all knowledge, a resurrection after death, and a cosmos with meaning. Content with this knowledge, the teacher could now contemplate the cosmos with the satisfaction of understanding that for now at least would have to do.

Evolutionary Psychology

As the story goes, the Greek philosopher Zeno was beating his slave one day, and the slave cried out: "Master, why do you beat me, seeing that my behavior is determined to be so as you have said in your philosophy?" To which Zeno replied: " Yes, and I fear that my beating you is also quite determined.

Moral: whether free will or determined, we will still behave the same.

However one may regard the merits of the free will vs. determinism debate, it is quite true that however one stands on the issue, one will still behave the same. And this is why no one really cares that much about philosophical issues like this, it just doesn't have any practical implications for their lives.

Now, practicality is the great spoil sport for grand philosophical ideas. If it's impractical, its ignored (except in philosophy books and courses), and if it purports to be practical, then it must generate procedures that are testable. Freudians and behaviorists found this out the hard way, as

psychoanalysis and behavior analysis became progressively ignored and hence irrelevant as their procedures they generated weren't quite up to snuff, or were no different than common sense applied. Contemporary academic and pop psychologists understand this too well, and make sure that the procedures they generate are hard to test, can generate tests that are predetermined to come out supporting their conclusions, or suggest tests that really aren't tests (e.g. the testimonial). The rub is, no matter how many psychological 'proofs' that one can assemble that giving gold stars to children will make them disinterested (self determination theory), or that motivational suggestion (e.g. hypnosis, Dr. Phil) can allow one to walk on water, these procedures must still work in the real world.

They don't, and thus they are safely relegated to academia, the self help circuit, and the Oprah show.

In spite of the fact that psychology has as much practical traction as a tire on ice, psychologists continue to blather on with explanations that remain untestable, impractical, and downright useless. The latest psychological movement that fills this bill is evolutionary psychology. Whereas in the past, psychological determinism was the useless argument du jour, the argument now has vaulted to GENETIC determinism. That is, you are still determined to do what you do, but blame those naughty genes! Evolutionary psychologists has provided psychologists, biologists, and other assorted cranks a field day to hypothesize all sorts of genetic reasons (or should I say alibis) for all sorts of behavior from altruism and sexuality to thumbsucking and voting republican. And rather than isolate the real neurological cause tethered to a real identifiable gene, they defer that issue to a convenient time, say one million years into the future, and instead justify it by

saying that our Paleolithic ancestors had to rape women, suck their thumbs, or select leaders who espoused family values because survival depended on it. And because survival depended on it, the genes they passed on to their children encoded these so important traits.

The point is whether it is true or not, who cares? Indeed, to shut them up, I am willing to grant that it is all true, just like I tell my child that Santa and the Easter Bunny exists. Because in truth it doesn't really matter if it's true or not, because people will continue to behave the same. That's why much of the social sciences, and evolutionary psychology in particular, is just a big empty box. There's nothing in it for us common folk, therefore we ignore it. Presently, evolutionary psychology has lit up the intellectual landscape because it is new, and because there are still a lot of traits that still have to be explained (e.g. procrastination, jock itch, shoe fetishes) by postulating new and fanciful genetic causes. But when that's done, then evolutionary psychology will fade from the intellectual landscape, much as Freudian and behavioristic psychology have become mere intellectual afterthoughts.

And of course, we will still continue to behave the same.

Evolution, Human

In the beginning, man was brutish, nasty, quite stupid, and a poor conversationalist. Cro-magnum man, as we was known, soon found out that such appearance and demeanor did not bide well with the ladies. So, before he could evolve such things as manners and brains, he relied on the next best thing, and made it with the ladies by, well, making off with the ladies. This rather rude sort of behavior soon invoked much peer pressure, which soon turned into evolutionary pressure. Man thus

evolved a larger brain that allowed him the means to entice (and often con) the ladies with pretty phrases and even prettier promises. As man discovered the seductive powers of language, he became cultured. Another offshoot developed which celebrates the more macho qualities of the homo sapiens. This sub-species, several of which have been excavated in Hawaii, have been dubbed cro-magnum P.I.

Although most biologists trace man's lineage to ape-like primates, a less supported school of thought has seriously contested this notion, and presumes that man did not evolve from primates at all, but from a line of very ancient major appliances. This line of reasoning derives from the work of Ingemar Crowdadski, who in his excavation of the Jellystone rift in Wyoming discovered the partial remains of ancient appliances near fossilized campsites, barbecue pits, and volleyball poles. Since no human bones were found amid the remains. Crowdadski was forced to conclude that our common ancestors included Proctor-Silex toaster ovens and port-o-lets. Crowdadski was latter committed in 1987.

As man evolved, he reveled in his newfound wisdom, and lest the female of the species get a hold of that wisdom, and spoil all his newfound fun, he consigned her to a life of knitting, bread kneading, and baby making. This was the age of classical Greece, where in the words of the great philosopher Plato, "a woman is just a woman, but a good cigar is a smoke". So by being kept thoroughly ignorant, women learned their place. Unfortunately, although woman was now docile and submissive, she was also stupid, and nothing puts a greater damper on a night out on the town than a stupid date. The classical man of course had a cure for this, and developed several genetic offshoots that could adapt better to this barren social scene. These sub-species were called homo-intoxicus and hom-sexualis.

Homo-intoxicus and homo-sexualis have preserved the Greek way to

this day, and continue to survive in various socio-economic niches. Homo-intoxicus can be found gathered in various 'fraternity' houses that border college campus's, while the homo-sexualis' favorite environment is select wateringholes in major cities. Both species congregate among themselves for mutual support and comfort, but for very different reasons that the reader may easily infer.

Classical man soon tired of his intellectual pretense and reverted back to the brutish good old days, when a man was a man and a woman wondered why. Woman took a dim view of these rude carryings on, since after all, these were the dark ages. As the fashions of civilizations changed, man rediscovered religion, and discovered social diseases. These discoveries spurred great feelings of guilt when he was among the ladies, so he remedied his bad feelings by simply removing the ladies. Out of sight out of mind was the motto, and Puritan man, as he was known then, could get about his business with the sure knowledge that the evil temptations stimulated by the female form could hardly arise if she were shrouded, cloistered, and otherwise put in domestic storage.

Over the centuries, Puritan man mellowed considerably, and the final variation of this sub-species endures almost to this day. This subspecies was the evolutionary by product of a frightful era when men went about in armored contraptions that seemed like motorized dinosaurs, and crashed into and pulverized each other for God and country. This was of course the 'modern' era, when man covered himself with mud, rubble, and glory. All that glory somehow made is seem worthwhile, and whether a man was a conquering hero, or if he was a German or Japanese, a conquered hero, you could be sure that the ladies in their general relief certainly weren't going to give him a hassle when he came marching home. The post-war man, which we shall call G.I. Joe, took his wartime lessons to heart, and became a captain of industry who lorded over this family like a benevolent despot, and lived in a home which

also doubled as his castle.

All was well with the world until G.I. Joe, benevolent and ingenious fellow that he was invented such wonderful little devices such as toaster ovens, washing machines, and frozen food. Women suddenly had a lot of free time, and through a seemingly innocent pursuit of education, they became increasingly restless, and began to present a lengthening series of demands to their erstwhile lord and master. Soon, peasant revolts spread throughout the land, and a high divorce rate caused many a castle to crumble to the ground. G.I. Joe refused to change his haughty and dominating posture, and surrender his throne to those female upstarts. Although he had hardly changed, he became known now as the Male Chavunist Pig, and soon many women avoided his company for less porcine and more sensitive mates. Now women, by virtue of their growing power and influence, took charge of the evolutionary tree, and selected men who were sensitive, considerate, had tiny little testicles, and who looked like either Alan Alda or Phil Donahue. However, the most intelligent women were too busy creating their own little castles to find time to mate, and pretty soon the world was filled with the offspring of sensitive men and stupid women. By the end of the 21st century, mankind has completely dies out, leaving behind a rich legacy of culture, and of course, major appliances. And so, the wheel of evolution came totally around, and the process began anew.

Feedback Overload

Since the invention of writing, the written word has literally piled up. Indeed, from very early on, mankind has been overloaded with information. However, the problem posed by of information overload is

not in a metaphorical stack of stuff, but in our relative inability of finding the needle of information we need in the haystack of information we don't. Things like the Dewey decimal system, book indexes, and a helpful librarian barely addressed the problem until the invention of the internet search engine allows us to find our need, or in this case, needles. As the pundit Nicholas Carr opined^a, the problem we confront today is not finding a needle in an infinite informational haystack, but finding an infinite stack of needles that all merit consideration. Nowadays, when we electronically search for any topic, we are provided with many similar bits of information that allow us to more precisely fine tune or correct the deficiencies of knowledge. This error correction or feedback function represents a progressive resolution of the discrepancies between what we do and don't know. Feedback may represent unexpected changes in our progress to a goal and/or unexpected changes in our knowledge of the nature of a goal. Feedback of course is essential to learning, but consequential to that learning is the increased activity of midbrain dopamine neurons, and it is the neuro-modulator dopamine that enables the consolidation of memory as well as heightened alertness and attention on the task at hand. But dopamine also increases positive affect that adds momentary value or 'incentive salience' to behavior, but does not intrinsically predict the overall or long term goodness or utility *of* behavior. Put a bit differently by the neuro-psychologist Kent Berridge, "The brain results suggest that pure decision utility—and not predicted utility—is raised by activating mesolimbic dopamine systems^b." What this means is that the importance of the decision in the moment, or its 'decision utility' does not influence its long term or 'predicted utility'. The implications of this are profound, for as the marginal predicted utility of examining each informative 'needle' declines, the successive needles of information remain novel and their decision utility stays high, and we continue to dwell on nearly redundant links of information not because they are

useful but because they are new. In other words, whereas in the past impoverished feedback environments caused us to waste much time looking *for* information, the rich feedback environments heralded by improvements in web search lead us to waste much time looking *at* information! This means that we will be affectively and not rationally inclined to overstay our welcome on sites that not only provide us what we want and need, but infinite variations of the same information that we 'want' but don't need. The problem thus is not information overload, but 'feedback overload', as the ever increasing amount and granularity of information feedback provides greater and greater detail that can increase the short term or moment to moment value of behavior to the detriment of our long term interests.



Information Search, CA 1960



Information Search, CA 2011

This increase in the momentary incentive salience of behavior can be used to conform with (if not predict) practical ends, but its ultimate value depends upon *whose* practical ends. For example, the 'Khan Academy' (khanacademy.org) is an online math tutorial that uses rich feedback embodied in badges, scores, hints, etc. to increase the decision utility of performing math exercises in service of the predicted utility of long term mastery of say, the mathematical calculus. On the other hand, a Google search also provides rich feedback including social network feeds, instant messaging, videos, helpful links, and now badges in the service of the predicted utility of Google, namely advertising.

Ultimately, the problem is not that we are lost in a haystack, but that we are proverbially resting on a bed of pins and needles with each pin needlessly diverting our attention. The notion of 'feedback overload' means we are neurologically inclined to overvalue the short term importance or salience of new information, and when new information

scales in amount, availability, and relevance, we begin to live for a moment that may not conform to our ultimate good. For the rich feedback mechanisms provided by the internet, whether it is social media or just plain search, the solution to this problem is not better filtering of information or better feedback (as this merely exacerbates the problem), but less, and can only be accomplished by constraining what information you can see, or when you can see it. The simple solution is keeping your personal library and newspaper, and severely restricting your time with search tools (the internet) that work too well. As internet feedback trends to infinity in ever morphing detail and availability, this will be our only option to spare us a new dark age caused by being blinded by the light.

The French

A Lesson from an Alternate History

In 1941, America learned its lesson. War is bad, let's give peace a chance. And so then president Wilbur 'sponge-bob' Milquetoast apologized to the Japanese, and found that the Nazis were equally reasonable and nice.

Thus we had peace in our time, or well, at least peace in our backyards. And so the Japanese civilized half the world's people by killing them. The Germans would have repeated the favor for the other half, except the Russians had a few slight objections, and rolled up through

Germany and half of Europe, making the world a socialist paradise. They stopped their tanks at the border of France. They didn't go further for an obvious reason. After all, they were French.



After all, they're French

And so the French stayed Nazi, and as we all know about Nazis, they are indeed a mischievous bunch. And so, as time went on French Nazis slaughtered and gassed their own people, invaded Italy and occupied its pasta fields, and seized Switzerland to get a hold of all that cheese. Naturally, the world responded, and drove the evil French Nazis from Switzerland and Italy, but decided not to rid themselves of the evil French Nazis by taking Paris. After all, they were French.

Around this time, American found its balls after Catholic fundamentalists blew up half its really large buildings. President Jon 'the Duke' Wainwright dispatched the Born Again Christian Soldiers to root out the Catholic fundamentalists from their monasteries in the mountains of Sicily. Then he noticed that the evil Nazis continued their

quest to build weapons that would annihilate all life as we know it. This was not nice. And so the USA supported the separatist Vichy-soiss people in the south of France, and built up a force of three million troops in the principality of Monaco for an invasion. The world of course was dismayed. Why in heaven would you want to go to war with a regime that is despised by its people, threatens its neighbors, and builds weapons of mass destruction to sell on E-bay? The Catholics would interpret it as an assault on their religion, and thus cause Catholic terrorism everywhere. The world knew as well that this wasn't a war to liberate France, but an effort to seize their cheese! Besides, these people were quite incapable of democracy. They were after all, French!

And so, America, in a very diplomatic way, said F*** you to the world, invaded anyways, and in five minutes the French were free. The French people greeted the Americans with wild approval and applause. Sadly, after three days, the Americans began to be overcharged for their rooms and meals, and overall were treated very rudely. The Americans then left en masse, vowing to never vacation there again.

And then the world said with a shrug. "We told you so! After all, they're French!"

Games

We view with humorous tolerance the games of little boys. The mock violence of 'cowboys and Indians' and other war like games is something kids just outgrow, and has as much enduring value as baby teeth. But this common sense opinion misses the point. Although the content of children's games is transformed with maturity, the abstract form remains the same. Competition, whether it be for a better job, a preferred spouse, or a higher status job remains the names of the game,

and we learn this game as children. The difference for us is in the complexity of our adult games, and in the veneer of etiquette that provides the velvet glove for iron hand of competitive reality. Let's face it, we either like people or we don't, desire certain things or don't desire them; yet social convention rightly masks the brutal decisiveness of these decisions. We can all recall the unintended cruelties we inflicted on each other as children. The uninhibited candor, simplistic thinking, and readiness to follow every impulse makes kids lovable, unpredictable, and on the flip side, something near akin to proto-Nazis. If you're liked or disliked, a child will let you know it, and you'd better move out of the way if he or she doesn't like you. As adults, our likes and dislikes are no less intense, and we are equally as brutal in casting judgement on those who cross us or do not strike our fancy. But do we tell them about these sharp opinions? Of course not. Save for the inevitable outlet of gossip, we let them know through a subtle form of sign language called game playing.

A game is any non-verbal means of communication that is aimed at achieving some very specific goal, and is directed at an individual who is employing a similar mode of communication to in turn realize his or her goal. It is, in other words, a type of non-verbal bargaining, and it comes with a multitude of rules that are constantly shifting with different circumstances and individuals. Game playing exists because it deflects, dilutes, or defers the need to make and/or reveal final personal judgements. And this is all for the good, for often we're unprepared to decide what we want or when we want it, or to reveal a future decision which is at variance to what we've decided at the moment.

The best way to understand this non-verbal posturing is to exact from it an English translation. Let's say boy meets girl at a party; how would he approach her if he was to state his intentions in plain English, or in other words, without playing games? Given his inclinations, he might say

something like this. "Well, Doris, I find you very attractive and personable, and I'm willing to go out with you for a couple of weeks or so until I find someone better. Of course, if the relationship doesn't get sexual by the third date, I'll drop you cold for Carol over there in the corner. But then again, if you can cook lasagna well, like Chopin preludes, and don't hum in the shower, I could get romantically involved with you. Still, romance would have to wait until I see how my budding relationship with Mary turns out. I'm sure you'll find my plans for you agreeable, for its not everyday that a young lady gets to go out with an unemployed mattress tester."

Needless to say, such a line would fall flat like a lead balloon in any social situation, with an equally large chance that a lady would flatten the poor lout who would say such a thing. Nonetheless, hypothetical scripts like these pop into our heads in every interpersonal setting where we must make spot decisions as to whether or not to accept or reject the company of another. We know our personal agendas, but accomplishing that agenda means hiding much of it, while deducing the equally private agendas of others. The art of performing this task is the mark of a true gamesman.

The following types of games are some of the more common games that men and women play with one another. By understanding them and their subtle rules, we may find it easier to cut our losses by more easily recognizing when we're inadvertently playing on a losing end.

Hide and Seek

In hide and seek, after a date, the male closes his eyes and counts v e r y slowly to ten. Then, in a few days, much to the female's delightful surprise, he goes to great lengths to look her up, and after he finds her,

he sets up another date. A sad problem with this game is that often the male doesn't feel like playing any more, and while the poor young lady awaits patiently at home nestled next to the phone, the male has long stopped counting, and is currently on a bus to Topeka.

As many women know, hide and seek is a game that men often find distasteful. Even in relationships of more than minor significance, the male often begs out by disappearing off the map. Particularly for men who are on the hyperactive side, and there are many; they elect to play the game yet are soon diverted to other pursuits that also tend to be flirting and fleeing. Women are understandably very concerned about this hyperactivity among men, and many prescribe a saltpeter therapy to soothe this male rambunctiousness.

Sometimes in hide and seek the woman hides much too well, and try as he might, the man can never quite find her. When he manages to get on her trail, she tells him that she has to work, or is out of time, or has a headache. It is then that the male often fervently hopes that now she is well hidden, she stay hidden for a long time.

Charades

Whenever you meet members of the opposite sex in a social situation, they could tell you right then and there whether or not they're really interested in meeting you. But that of course would spoil all of the fun. Especially in a party, a good party game is necessary to provide the entertainment that candor surely cannot provide. That game is charades.

To play charades, you must be able to relay a simple message such as 'get lost' or 'come hither' to the person you're talking to through the artful use of body language, or else be able to read the same. The sooner that person or yourself 'gets the message', the better you'll do at charades.

You know that the person you're talking to is playing charades when he or she begins to move about or fidget in strange ways. This odd body language can be readily interpreted by an experienced charades player, who'll note the key physical nuances which give away what's on a person's mind. For example, a gentleman will note that a lady is less than interested if during the course of a conversation she begins to gravely scan the ceiling for invisible cracks. A lady on the other hand will rightly guess that a gentleman is attracted to her if he begins to breathe and perspire heavily as she discourses on the topic of Easter floral arrangements.

Charades is of course wildly popular at parties, as you find almost all guests playing at one time in the evening or other. Indeed, there are often two conversations going on simultaneously: a fake one where couples blather on about the weather or the price of milk, and the real conversation in which the simple turn of a cheek or arching of an eyebrow can speak volumes.

Chess

As human beings, we possess many attributes, each of which can allow us to make certain moves in certain ways. In chess, we come against individuals who are also making moves in specific ways, ways that can impede your own movement towards the goals you desire. To this end you predict what your opponent is going to do, and make the necessary moves to counter him. To succeed in chess, you need to develop strong analytical skills as well as a great degree of patience. Analytical skills are important because oftentimes someone isn't going to tell you what they're going to do, and you need to plan ahead the type of moves you could make and the likely countermoves of your opponent. Patience is also necessary because your opponent can be ambivalent about the

moves he or she should make, and you may have to wait weeks before a move is made. Grandmasters in chess can look ahead many moves, and are prepared for any future eventuality. Such master game players often show off by playing many games simultaneously. It is always fascinating to watch a grandmaster concurrently taking on a dozen or so female guests at a party. Moving from guest to guest in rapid succession, he would put on a clever move and then flit on, leaving each guest to ponder her next move in eager anticipation.

In the following scenario, we will take you through highlights of a sample chess match between two experienced players, who shall be called Mr. White and Miss Black. Mr. White of course always makes the first move.

Move 1 Mr. White: opening flirt

Miss Black: counter flirt

These opening moves effectively test the defenses of the opposite party while protecting the ego from direct assault. These players will exchange flirts in their first few opening moves.

Move 7 Mr. White: make offer for a date

Miss Black: takes offer

Mr. White advances his offer, which Miss Black takes, thus lowering her personal defenses for White's further moves.

Move 18 Mr. White: invites Miss Black over to his apartment for drinks.

Miss Black: moves to White's apartment

White's aggressive game so far has lured Black into an exposed position through the selective sacrifice of a few pieces, which he has placed on his American Express card.

Move 22 Mr. White: tries to mate Ms. Black

Miss Black: slugs Mr. White

White rashly tries to mate Miss Black, while exposing his side to a devastating countermove by Miss Black that effectively checks him. Although White retreats later to a more conservative position, the game is later called a draw.

Trivial Pursuit

As a popular and fun game, just about everybody is into the pursuit of trivia. Indeed, if you haven't mastered all the right trivia, you'll stand to lose out in the play of this highly competitive game. Of particular

popularity is a special edition of the game called dating trivia. In this game, to win a date with someone, you'll have to answer correctly six questions drawn from six fascinating topics: religion, personal history, education, culture, and social diseases. Answering any question correctly gives you the chance to keep moving, or should we say, putting on the moves. However, an incorrect answer will cause you to lose your turn as the questioning individual will move on to the next player. Since that person may not come back to you for quite some time if at all, it is important that the player have at his or her fingertips a command of all the right trivia.

In response to this pressing need, a veritable cottage industry has sprung up to provide a wealth of trivial information and advice to the serious game player. Such erudite journals as Playboy and Cosmopolitan are often consulted by those folks who feel that they're not quite trivial enough.

Trivial Pursuit is truly a game for the 90's, for in the age of fast food, fast track careers, and M-TV, we really don't have time for boring in depth conversations with each other. Indeed, as a motto for our times, you don't have to be deep, you just have to be trivial

Poker

God dealt us only one hand of cards, so its best to always play them close to the vest. Of course, in poker, the object is to get the other person to think that your cards are a lot better than his. The fact is , God played a big joke on almost all of us by dealing no cards greater than the value of 10. The trick is to convey the impression that God deals lots of aces, and only to you. The pleasure of poker is in the art of the bluff, and

masters of this game can puff up as much thunderous bluster as the Wizard of Oz.

Poker is best played in smoky, dimly lit rooms that are filled with a noisy cacophony of voices and throbbing music. These poker halls, which are also called singles bars, allow the good poker player to properly shield his cards from the other players, thus decreasing the likelihood that they will call his bluff. If a poker bluff is called, all players must display their true cards, and the losing player must fold and withdraw from the game. Drawing many of his hints from such works as 'Dress for Success', 'Power Lunching', and 'Looking out for Number 1', the novice poker player must not only learn to present a good poker face, but also learn how to arrange all the necessary poker props such as pin stripe suits, leather briefcases, posh luncheons, etc. to achieve the right phony effect. If you can keep a straight face, you will soon be flush with admirers who will see in you that shrewd captain of industry, gay bon vivant, and all around desirable guy that your delusions keep telling you are.

Parcheesi

In Parcheesi the object of the game is to line up all of your marbles in a long neat row, with each marble positioned just behind the next through judicious rolls of the die. Parcheesi has long been a favorite among men, who take special delight in lining things up for a weekend of the week. However, more and more women are becoming interested in the game. Through a carefully planned die roll, which is better known as a phone call, the Parcheesi player hopes to move all of his marbles, better known as dates, into the vacant positions in

the time she has allotted for the week. Usually, this is no problem,

unless of course she is also playing Parcheesi, in which case a lively evening is in store.

A likely Parcheesi scenario would be as follows: Player A tries to move his marble to Friday night at 9pm. But lo! Player B already has her marble on that time. Player A's marble can't move, and on Player B's turn, she suggests Saturday at 8pm. Player A, who has an open space at that time, agrees, and if player B has succeeded in lining up her weekend first, she wins. Sometimes a Parcheesi player will insist on playing an opponent who has her marbles lined up for many weekends to come, or so he is told. This poor fellow is fated to continually lose at Parcheesi, and plays indeed as if he has lost all of his marbles. Such rigged games are to be avoided whenever possible.

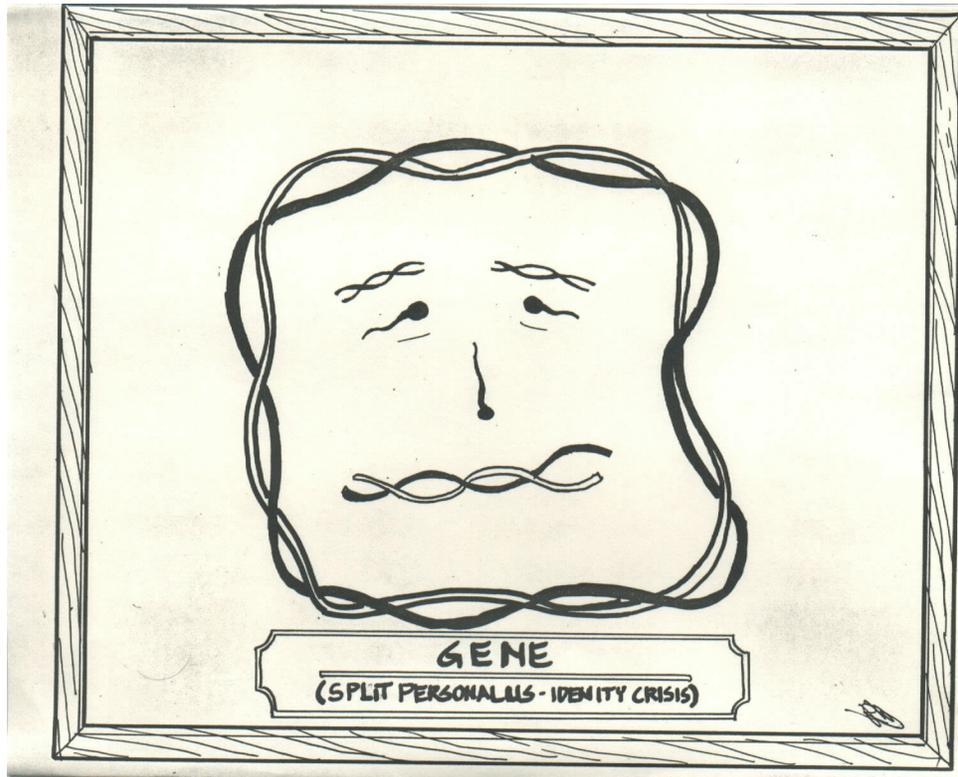
Clue

Let's just face it, people can often be very mysterious, and among all those folks whom you happen to go out with, its up to you to find out who's the lady killer, or if the case may be 'femme fatale'. To play clue, you must explore the various rooms of your date's (i.e., suspect) house or apartment, all the while keeping an eye peeled for tell-tale clues which tell you what your date is really like. As you roam around the house, you pick up clues in such varied places as magazine racks, bookcases, and bathroom cabinets, and when you visit enough rooms, you'll be able to tell whether your date is in fact a guilty culprit. When this happens, you immediately rise, point to your date, and accuse him of the crime. Boiled down from the usual vengeful hysteria, your accusation usually says something like Col. Mustard, with the nylons, in the bedroom. Your date must, if devoid of good excuses, admit to his crime. It is then that you declare victory, and storm from his apartment in angry glory.

Gene

Once upon a time, when the earth was new, there was this inorganic chemical. Let's call him Gene. Now Gene was rather simple as chemicals go, as he was made up of only a few simple strands of molecules. Existing as he did in an antediluvian broth, life was, or rather non-life was tough for entities like Gene. Unpleasant things like sunshine, lightning bolts, and temperature extremes always shook up his solution, resulting in unfortunate fractures in his molecular chain. Without thinking, Gene soon came up with an answer to his predicament. He would simply evolve a molecular shell to protect himself from all those nasty events, a survival machine of sorts to provide him a way to inertly repose and from time to time replicate. It came natural to Gene that he would make something out of himself. In his case, it was more of himself, although when he went about this process he was quite divided. Pretty soon Gene was all over the place, as he continued to divide and divide. This Gene pool soon became very crowded, and it was impossible to replicate further without the necessary raw materials. So Gene evolved a new version of his molecular shell that enabled him to cannibalize all his other duplicates that weren't so well equipped. Having done so, Gene again began to divide and divide. The other Genes however weren't going to take this lying dormant, and soon they evolved their own molecular add-ons that provided them with a tougher shell, higher mobility, or cannibalizing capabilities of their own. To meet this growing competition, Genes began to cooperate by linking up with one another, with each Gene assigned a specific job. Naturally, certain Genes would do their jobs better than others, and a way was needed to select for those genes that could best contribute to the Gene team. Soon, Gene chains were meeting regularly to exchange genetic material. This allowed each chain to test out new combinations of genetic talent in the ever more competitive game of life. The evolution of the

periodic genetic exchange, which is also known as sex, caused a veritable explosion in the complexity and type of survival machines. More and more genes came together in ever lengthening communities, and soon the world was well populated with a growing assortment of lumbering and colliding molecular robots. Now Gene was a naturally passive and inert sort, and each robot, when constructed and wound up, would only follow the preset instructions that it was originally given. Gene couldn't modify these instructions when situations rapidly changed, as they surely would; and he needed some apparatus to provide a kind of automatic pilot for his aimlessly cavorting robot. So Gene naturally selected an array of sensors to be attached to the outside shell. These sensors were reactive to a variety of changing stimuli such as water pressure, sound and light, and were hooked up by a series of molecular strings which wound about the machine. This 'nervous system' gave Gene the means to automatically coordinate the increasingly complexity of his survival machine.



Gene

Yet, even when equipped with a wide range of reflexes, the Gene machine could only react when it confronted a new situation, and not before. To react before a situation occurs demands that the probabilities of certain events be calculated before a certain movement was made. To do this, an internal simulation of the outside environment has to be performed that would give the machine the foresight to react to impending events. A computational device was obviously needed. In short, Gene need his own

PC, or personal cerebrum. Since Gene needed to model external events internally, that means that his PC had to categorize and classify all of the information that he received from his sensors. Larger PC's and sensory modems gave Gene increasing capabilities to process and receive ever-greater amounts of information, and soon Gene's centralized nervous system became very specialized. Marvelous optical, acoustical, and olfactory devices were evolved as attachments to the PC. These knob like devices, also called the eyes, ears, and nose, were hooked up in close proximity to the PC, which was by then encased in a bone colored shell that was able to swivel about on its vertebrate stand. Soon the PC was able to make extremely detailed models of the outside world in three dimensions, and in living color. These models were stored in memory, and the PC was able to call up former memories at will and project out all sorts of what-if situations. As the PC's memory grew, it became able to perform an every increasing array of mental tricks, such as controlling many thousands of operations at once (multitasking), and making models of the models of the models it created. The PC itself was able to perceive itself perceiving, and soon it became quite conscious of this fact. The PC thought, therefore it was, and it became oblivious to the fact that it was after all just a machine built to serve Gene. Some gratitude!

The latest version of the PC, called the homo sapiens, was hampered by this pesky self consciousness, yet it nonetheless followed Gene's programmed imperative and shortly became the PC standard. Soon other non-human PC's were destroyed to make room for the new model, or else they were consigned to PC museums (zoos) for the instruction of young homo-sapiens.

The current model of the homo sapiens PC most commonly in use is the PC-XT, or short for Xtra threatening. This PC is equipped with external memory storage devices (books) that allow it to access more information than ever before. With such information available, homo-sapiens is able to

construct for itself a near infinite array of devices to improve its mobility (the car), hallucinatory powers (TV), and competitive capabilities (guns and nuclear missiles).

In spite of the PC's unpredictable hijinks, Gene still retained control over the important PC programs that were crucial to his continued duplication. The most important was the automatic orientation and duplication mechanism, or in other words, the sex drive. Sex was obviously a more complicated trick for Gene than in the good old, old days, when all that was needed was a cup of nutrient broth and a willing cell or two. For the homo sapiens gene machine, special input and output ports had to be designed for the easy transfer of genetic material, and triggering mechanisms had to be in place to signal when the gene machines were to hook up. Random coupling was undesirable given the homo-sapiens PC's ability to visually sort out prime reproductive candidates. To do this, the PC was programmed with special pattern recognition subroutines which were directly hooked up to the sex drive. Upon recognition of a suitable form, the PC would orient towards the object, input port at the ready, in preparation for a possible interface leading to coupling. For the male of the species, this form takes an hourglass shape, with special attention drawn to two round bulges located in the front anterior. For the female, a more blockish shape is preferred, with special emphasis on rippling striated musculature. For both sexes however, Gene was quite unadventurous regarding facial features, preferring to link up with those males and females who had rather regular and bland facial designs. Gene had always had his best success by staying with tried and true designs, and these extended to a uniformity in those optical acoustical, and olfactory knobs, which when set to an oval face, made something rather ordinary looking. However, to the homo-sapiens, it was beautiful.

The homo-sapiens is complex, and takes about nine months to construct. The female homo-sapiens is provided with an internal factory which builds to order new gene machines from the DNA blueprints, half of which are kindly ported over by the male. The internal duplication factory takes up most of the resources of the female, whereas the male can continue to hop from female to female making genetic deliveries. If he's good, he'd soon become a captain or should we say father of industry, and have many factories humming along merrily and at little cost to himself. Naturally, the female can't go hopping about like the male, as she needs a full time male to help take delivery of her bundle of joy. If the gene machine was male, then Gene could theoretically leverage out his genetic blueprints to make literally hundreds of baby gene machines in his image. Not so for the female gene machine, which can only make a few machines in her lifetime, and raise them only with the help of the male. Depending upon whether he dwelled in a male or female machine, Gene would be at an advantage or disadvantage relative to his peers. To help solve this problem, Gene became sexist. The male gene continued to impart operating instructions which spelled no limit to acquisition and merger activity. All that was needed for a 'go' signal was the right visual signal, of hourglass shape of course, that denoted the reproductive potential of the female. For the female, the visual image of a male didn't so obviously denote the characteristics which were crucial to her and her offspring's survival. She could ill afford to respond so reflexively to the male form, so she took her time in examining the male, and favored traits that demonstrated the male's reliability, power, and devotion to her. Now all this demanded time and deliberation by the female PC, yet Gene quite reasonably couldn't wait forever. So he gave the PC a little shove which turned ambivalence into action. He did this by making the PC into a drug addict.

Now Gene was a quite sensible drug pusher, wanting only that the PC opt to fantasize about devotion and coupling before he would give it a pleasurable high. Even the male gene got into the act, and to make the male PC compromise its own worldly ways, drugged it from time to time as well. This drub induced stupor was called 'falling in love', and it served Gene by putting an abrupt halt to the sexual dilly dallying that could make male and female gene machines circle each other endlessly in fruitless negotiation. It was quite an underhanded tactic of course, but Gene would do anything to survive; it came of course quite naturally.

Ginzu Psychology

Ginzu knives. You know the product. You can't find them at local stores, but with this televised offer, you can get them now. Operators are standing by.

That's an infomercial for you. Hawked on TV channels at times otherwise reserved for test patterns, infomercials demonstrate to you products that you simply cannot do without. The products of course create no muss, have no fuss, and perform genuine miracles. And better yet, you see them making succulent pot roast, toning perfect bodies, and sculpting perfect julienne fries. The perfect product is received in a perfect way as breathless and excited, the audience coos and applauds rapturously, prompted on by ecstatic delirium of the host.

Of course, when you finally get the miracle product, it doesn't do the job, breaks after a week, and is far less functional than the can opener, pressure cooker, or dumbbell it replaced. Which explains why local stores don't carry such junk, namely because it's easier to bring your dull ginzu back to a Wal-Mart than mail it back to a p.o. box in Costa Rica. Now of course, we all feel dumb after we buy this crap, but at least we have the

alibi that we saw the darn thing in action.

Unfortunately, when it comes to another type of infomercial, we don't even have this excuse. I am of course referring to the most nefarious infomercial product of them all: the self help video, course, or tape. Self help infomercials, whether they help you earn a million or feel like a million, don't even explain their product, they just have testimonials for the product. That means that you won't see or learn how this information works, you just have to take the word from those very satisfied and genuinely honest customers whose lives have been profoundly changed by that information. Of course, unlike a ginzu knife, you can't bring information back when it invariably doesn't work, which of course isn't their fault because you haven't followed their instructions to begin with. So there you have it, the perfect infallible product: you buy it in ignorance, use it ignorantly, and when it fails it's because you're an utter ignoramus. Makes you want to become a psychologist, a con artist with dignity!

And of course, I'm right. Just take my word for it.

Gladiator Therapy

If the world has got you down, you can just escape your problems by mentally escaping to fun and fictional worlds where justice was as swift and sure as a good whack to the head. That is, why talk things through when you can run things through, or at least do it mentally? If you can't cut off the source of your problems, at least you can cut the heads off of the people who caused them for you. That's the healing power of a healthy imagination.

What's the value of forgiveness, love, and understanding when all it gets you is a perpetual reduction to psychological burger meat? I for one

would rather be doing the slicing and dicing rather than suffering a death of a thousand unkind cuts Obviously, running amuck in the city center with a thousand round a minute nail gun like you see in video game shooters is not quite practicable. That leaves us with our imagination to get things done. Nevertheless, no matter how vivid your daydreams, it still needs some Hollywood special effects, or better, Hollywood hyperbole! When you mix grand characters with grander emoting, there's no telling what you can do in the fever pitch of your delusions. That's positive thinking with a real bite to it! It's also a whole lot more satisfying than merely repeating to your self 'I know I can, I know I can' like the little choo-choo that could. Thus, rather than engaging in wussified 'love your inner child', 'think happy thoughts' therapy forced upon you by your effete psychotherapist, why not go for the gusto and engage in the type of self help ancient Roman Gladiators used to get by from day to day? When you merge positive thinking with the imagery of an axe to the head, that's not just psychology, that's entertainment!

For example, who can forget that epic scene in the movie 'Gone with the Wind' when our heroine Scarlett O'Hara realized that when the evil Yankees burned her plantation down, she was inadvertently placed on an all turnips, all the time diet. Declaiming that she would get through all this if she had to beg, borrow, or steal, one heard her cry with her figure silhouetted against a crimson sky to the swelling of massed violins. "As God is my witness, I'll never be hungry again!!" Who among us hasn't taken this as an emotional rallying cry to ask our boss for a raise, take a course in accounting, or at least raid the refrigerator?



I'll never be hungry, fat, bored, overtaxed, etc. again!

Or when the Romans asked where Spartacus was because they were 'cross' with him, or when Henry Bailey lost his money for his Building and Loan, wasn't it just as inspiring to know that your friends will come through? Cinematic metaphors are just the ticket to get you up for a difficult day, or suggest that when the rubber hits the road, your friends or your guardian angel will hold you up.

Gladiator Therapy Exercise

As an exercise in Gladiator Therapy in action, pick a motion picture where you have a hero persecuted by some evil folks, and who triumphs or at least dies heroically in the end. We'll use naturally the movie Gladiator as a case in point, although films like Rambo, the Terminator, and the

Wizard of Oz may also be used. The film opens up with a real swell battle scene where you and people you like (e.g. your bowling league, U.S. Marines, Florida State football team) are up against some awful barbarian hordes (e.g. your irritating in-laws, North Koreans, Internal Revenue Service, University of Miami football team.)



**Your bowling league, US Marines etc. vs.
your irritating in-laws, French people, etc.**

You and your pals of course kill them all in a bloody battle, but you are betrayed by a usurper to the throne, who takes your easy chair, your corner office, or your bank account. As he thinks he's got you down for the count, you retort thusly: " I am the follower of: George Bush, FSU sports, almighty God, almighty dollar, etc. You have killed my family, taxed me, bored me, etc. and in this life or the next I WILL HAVE MY VENGEANCE!" Then you kill him, assassinate his character or something like that. Of course you probably won't do these things, but for now it sure feels good that you can cinematically portray the comeuppance of

your enemies! Just take one movie a day and a little bit of positive play acting, and soon you'll be emoting with satisfaction as you portray your enemies being chopped to bits, obliterated by cannon fire, or having bad hair days. Thus your bad emotions will be purged, and you will be able to whistle while you work, and happily skip and saunter through your day, oblivious to any care in the world!

God Gene

A common excrescence, or should we say expression in evolutionary psychology is an announcement by some academic type of the discovery of a new gene that controls an aspect of our behavior, such as altruism, thumb sucking, incest, or voting Republican. The latest dubious discovery is the 'God gene'. The God gene is no more than a gene that controls the transport mechanisms of mood altering chemicals, whatever that means. Now, I'm of the sort that thinks we believe in God due to the fact that we have a big neocortex (or grey matter), and thus can foresee bad things like death and taxes. Thus we postulate Gods and Republican administrations to eliminate the problem. Therefore there is no need to postulate a God or Republican gene. But that's besides the point.



Just call him Gene

Consider if you will a particular array of genes that only me and 7% of population have. They basically wire up my cerebral noggin with many more receptor genes for a particular little chemical called dopamine. Thus I and my minority compatriots are more sensitive to novelty and surprise, and seek it out wherever we can. Because this mood altering dopamine molecule is being transported all over my cerebral noggin due to the extra receptors I possess, I am more inclined to be a creative troublemaker. Thus I will be more likely to be a world conqueror, artist, scientist, or Republican president. Do I say therefore that I possess an artistic gene, Attila the Hun gene, or political gene? Well, no; because these genes, as well as other genes, control for general tendencies, not specific ones. Thus, all I can say is that these genes control for left-handedness, and sensitivity to surprise. Now a sensitivity to surprising or novel things doesn't have the cachet of an Attila the Hun gene, but evolutionary psychologists don't care to trumpet this blander fact because that's not where the money or notoriety is. The guy who discovered the God gene has written a new book, 'The God Gene', about it, and will make a lot of money, which goes to show that money talks, or that the poor fellow possesses the yet to be discovered 'bullshitter' gene.

Hungry Gene

It's a well known fact that we have a need to eat, but what is its cause: nature or nurture?. Researchers at the Academy of Lagado recently made the startling conclusion that the drive to eat is a genetic tendency, and does not derive from spoon feeding, breast feeding, Happy Meal coupons, or other purely environmental influences. It seems that long ago, creatures who ate had a decided reproductive advantage over creatures that didn't eat. Thus the non-eaters would tend to die off, leaving the eating population, and their 'hungry' genes around to propagate like crazy. The implications of this are startling. As Dr. Dawson Richard claims in his bold and original book, 'The Hungry Gene'. According to Dr. Richard, we are but molecular machines that exist to serve an inborn genetic craving for saturated fats, sweets, and special sauces. Richard makes the revolutionary claim that we do not eat to live, but rather live to eat!! Dr. Richard, who is the Ichabod Crane Professor of Neuro-spastic biology at the Academy of Lagado, says that ultimately we can't help ourselves when confronted with plates of chicken nuggets, potato chips, pizza slices, and chocolates because we are unconsciously driven by genetic puppet masters that have just got to eat. But these genetic puppet masters don't stop there, but direct even our table manners!!

In a carefully contrived series of experiments, Dr. Richard noted that when left alone in grocery stores, little children helped themselves to all sorts of food, from chips to fruit, and showed no concern about the fact that their behavior was quite rude, obnoxious, and even illegal. He then cleverly deduced that children not only have an inborn tendency to eat, but an equally inborn tendency to be rude, and to act like insensitive little brats. The genetic tendency to be rude probably arose from our early ancestors, who could obtain life-supporting nutrients faster if they snatched it from their parents, stole it from another's nest, or jumped

ahead of the line. This conclusion met with great controversy from other Lagado academics, who disputed the claim that we have an inborn tendency to be rude. Indeed, several critics noted that rudeness could not have been genetically favored in our ancestors, since rude behavior can only provide a series of quick snacks at best, which is hardly enough to secure the propagation of one's hungry genes.

Nonetheless, Richard knew he was on to something by his postulation of genetic puppet masters, since it explained lots of things without a wasteful recourse to unnecessary thinking. Indeed, he figured that the genetic metaphor can be extended to just about anything that involves some sort of selection, from marriage partners to shoes. Take ideas for instance. We often select different ideas by figuring out their value to us. Good ideas crowd out the bad, and can spread like crazy given enough marketing buzz. If we just think about ideas as little viral entities that can spread like cold germs and infest our minds like some mind altering plague, these 'memes' provide a whole new way for us to shift responsibility without shifting the way we think. Thus, when you are confronted with some new or imagined fault, just say it's not my fault, and merely blame those bad ideas.



Hungry Gene in Action

Empowered by his insight, in his following great work, 'The Copyrighted Phenotype', Richard expanded the Darwinian metaphor from everything from architecture to shopping. Thus the patterns and shapes of lumber that you see at your hardware store are selected because they have fittedness, pants are selected because they must have a tight fit, an adolescents can hardly wait to select each other (particularly if they are looking fit) and pass on their genes and memes. Thus, along with meme and genes, we have selfish beams, blue genes, and teens as new and exciting genetic metaphors that can be used to further our academic knowledge and dementia.

Hypnosis

It is the stuff of cheap Las Vegas acts, anti-smoking or weight loss scams, or bogus self-help books. It is ubiquitous and special, wholly inexplicable and near magical. It requires special words and procedures, engages a

unique mental state, and allows one to transcend human nature itself. It's a heady resume for a process that does not exist.

Franz Mesmer invented it, though magnetism was his thing. An 18th century charlatan, Mesmer convinced a gullible public that the newly discovered magnetic force was just the thing to cure whatever ails you. Just pass yourself under a powerful magnet, and a harmonious 'fluid flow' would be achieved, hence removing the 'obstacles' that caused disease. Funny thing though, many of his patients actually found their symptoms alleviated, and more than a few thought themselves cured. Since diseases tend to run their course, treatment or no treatment, and since illnesses tend to get worse if we ruminate about them, it was no surprise that the resulting placebo effect would be interpreted as representing something much more profound. If Mesmer was known for the placebo effect, his inadvertent contribution to medical knowledge would be much more obscure. However, he included one more element that added his name to the lexicon, and a procedure and process that has retained its credibility to this day.

To be mesmerized, or in more modern terms, 'hypnotized', was an integral part of Mesmer's therapeutic procedure. As an adjunct to the devices (which included magnets and even a glass harmonica!) that helped to achieve the right fluid flow, a trance state purged the obstacles causing the impairment of disease. The delirium and convulsions followed Mesmer's artful suggestions, resulting finally in a relieved patient and a practitioner bowing to applause. This made for great theater, as Mesmer and his patients unknowingly became the precursor to every hypnotic act, both stage and therapeutic to follow.



...before Dr. Phil, there was Mesmer

The postulation of a hypnotic state follows the fact that given the right setting, people can do some remarkable things that cannot be accounted for by the normal mental processes that we believe have governance over our behavior. Indeed, without the novelty and mystery it would scarcely be a process at all. Give a suggestion to a family member to mow the lawn, and whether they listen to you or not, it's no great shakes. However, if out of frustration you told some loved ones to jump in the lake or play in traffic, it would be a remarkable thing if they took you up on the offer. Of course, incongruity is relative, as your kin may have their own reasons. But hypnosis is more than a mysterious process that produces mysterious behaviors. Hypnosis also includes a set of procedures that induce it, and a unique mental or 'trance' state that opens the mind to suggestions. But is a trance state necessary for suggestion to take place or be more effective?

Fortunately, this is a very testable premise. Consider a rabbit's foot. If rubbing a rabbit's foot grants you luck, extra motivation, or God's grace,

than all you need do to prove the effectiveness of rabbit's feet is to compare one group of people who rub rabbit's feet to another group that does not. If the group that rubs rabbit feet is significantly more successfully, lucky, or is able to walk on water, then there must be something to rabbit's feet. On the other hand, if there is no difference between both groups, then it is safe to say that rabbit's feet have no special power.

This is precisely the approach the psychologist Theodore X. Barber employed in a review of an exhaustive series of experiments that controlled for different aspects of the hypnotic induction procedure among thousands of subjects. In his 1969 book 'Hypnosis: A Scientific Approach', Barber found that the sole element that accounted for hypnotic behavior, from seeming past life regression to increased sensory acuity to suggested anti-social behavior, was information derived from the experimental session that translated into positive expectancies for performance. Barber found that all of the behavioral phenomena normally associated with hypnosis could be produced among normally awake subjects, given the proper motivation of course. A 'trance state' was simply the behavioral equivalent of rubbing a rabbit's foot, a voluntary hysteria that was no more biologically rooted to extraordinary behavior than the magically productive hysterics of a crying child.

Although Barber and succeeding researchers on hypnosis demonstrated that information could elicit a staggeringly wide repertoire of behavior, these behaviors often extend beyond the more limited scope of what common sense informs us of our true capabilities. Hypnotic behaviors not only extend to commonplace voluntary behaviors, but to involuntary behaviors that otherwise seem immune to conscious control. Suggested physiological effects such as hallucinations, blindness, analgesia, etc. are all beyond the pale of our voluntary control and beyond the scope of common sense. Hence one must either question common sense

assumptions about behavior, or defer this complex question in favor of a special process that places an invisible mental gear in one's brain to make it all work. Given a historical ignorance of the neuro-psychological processes that map to environmental information, it has been easy to refer extraordinary behavior to special processes. Thus, hypnotic states come in from the back door as a cipher for special processes that we cannot yet grasp.

So, the invocation of a hypnotic state, like a miracle that saves the equation, allows one to still make predictions, if you accept of course poor predictions. But because it denotes no demonstrable neurological processes, as an explanation it is impossible. Indeed, no neural state has ever been identified that can account for the extraordinary capabilities of people when confronted with information that is phrased just right. Nor is one needed, since the problem, to paraphrase Shakespeare, is not in the stars, but in ourselves, or more concisely, in the very way we perceive our worlds.

To our common sense time and motion are absolute, fixed things. However, as Einstein demonstrated, this reality is an illusion, since physical constants vary depending upon what observer you measure them against. Thus a car may be moving relative to the perspective of one observer, but is immobile relative to another driver keeping pace. But relative things encompass not just the physical, but the behavioral, as goodness and evil, the extraordinary and mundane are dependent upon your experience and knowledge. The authority of a hypnotist may have an individual run a gauntlet of fire, act foolishly or immorally, and be none the concerned because of it. Yet similar behavior can be similarly produced by authority figures given credence by government or religion, and we likewise would be unconcerned with facts of our behavior that we would otherwise have found repugnant, embarrassing, or morally wrong. As authority perceived moves from the implicit and nonconscious (the

hypnotist) to the explicit and conscious (a commanding officer, religious leader), behavior itself moves from the remarkable to the commonplace, and the causes of behavior from the special to the mundane. Thus, an individual is hypnotized when indifferent to fear or pain if he runs a gauntlet of fire, but is merely heroic if that same gauntlet is a beach in Normandy in 1944. Remarkable behaviors engender remarkable causes, and just as heroism is not a 'thing' that requires a special mental process or module, neither are hypnotic events that are essentially as remarkable.



Were these men hypnotized?

When one does not look too closely at behavior, mental processes can multiply like rabbits, and one is forced to confront a verbal zoo of inferred processes from hypnosis to intrinsic motivation to 'flow' that upon closer inspection actually emerge from simpler, more rudimentary events that engage brain and body. The popular acceptance of such simple (and often simpleminded) reasons for behavior don't require much thought, but if

we do perchance think about them, our first instinct is to keep hypnotists and psychologists employed, who obligingly sustain our trance of ignorance that ironically needs no special name. Or perhaps, we can use the congealed pudding like stuff between our ears, and think.

Idiocracy

In Mike Judge's recent movie 'Idiocracy', only idiots reproduce, while smarter ones merely ponder the issue. Thus the morons inherit the earth. So the U. S. president is a pro- wrestler, the most popular movie is 'ASS' (a filmed version of just that), and we all wile away our time watching car explosions a la Nascar and pondering eternal mysteries like why a square peg doesn't fit into a round hole.

But genetics aside, there are many other ways to be an idiot. Take a shortened attention span for instance. If you can only spend five seconds on a topic before bolting to the next diversion, you are autistic. But if all that useless diversion is in your warped minds eye 'productive', bolting from from one diversion to another and back again becomes multi-tasking, and from your multi-tasking ipod/phone/computer, you become a master of the universe, or rather, its minutia.

The grand idea of our current culture is that you can build profundity in a thirty second blurb, so the news becomes celebrity and crime, or better yet, celebrity criminals. Similarly, artists or 'idols' are made after five minutes training and discovered after a five minute performance, and psychologists and politicians are vaunted as experts by their ability to master a pithy phrase. What is more, our grandest inventions allow us to port over the glory of a distracted life to every minute of our lives!

So we become a functionally autistic, with the brains but not the attention span. And we don't have to wait for evolution to bring us there.

Idiot Savant

As an individual who has a decidedly more than passing interest in psychology, my penchant for thinking about it all the time does call into question my ability to act and think about other important things, such as taking out the garbage. So regardless of whether my musings on the topic merit a Nobel or booby prize, my wife will think that as a man about the house, I am a total idiot. Which brings me to man's special genius and perhaps handicap, namely his ability to focus on one thing to the exclusion of almost everything else, and to do so forever. Isaac Newton was so accursed, and attributed his development of the calculus and the laws of gravity to simply thinking about it, constantly. Of course, he also thought constantly about the alchemical disciplines that aimed to discover how transmute lead into gold, and it is here that posterity has judged him not as a savant, but as a total idiot.

When we constantly think about any topic, we will master that topic, and amaze our friends with our intellectual acumen, if of course they care to listen. Mozart, Newton, and Einstein did this to popular and intellectual acclaim, but unfortunately male obsessions are a bit more mundane. So what do us guys have in mind for the future monomaniacal edification of the world? Usually it has something to do with recounting baseball statistics, reaching the fiftieth level in Dungeons and Dragons, or recalling all the episodes of Star Trek. Of course, we keep this special genius secret, partly because of modesty, but mainly because no one cares. Which brings us of course to real idiot savants, which is an unfortunate and pejorative name to give to those individuals who through a quirk of nature are neurologically attuned to focus on inconsequential acts that in their perfect execution become quite extraordinary. Whether it be the ability to perform unerring mental calculation, play the piano by ear and

with note worthy perfection, or just remember what one had for breakfast for all the days they have lived, idiot savants are too relentless in their quest for a single minded perfection. In fact, by being single minded, they have no mind for anything else, hence the unfortunate term idiot.

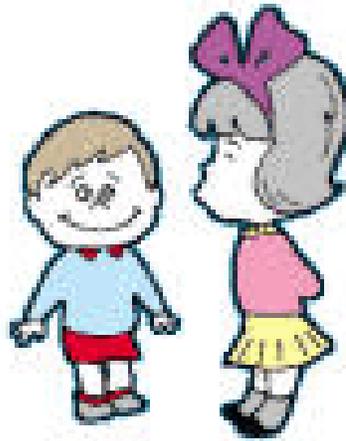
The curse of genius and madness is that both are single minded things. Whether it is displayed in obsessive compulsiveness, addiction, or autism, to call it good or bad, creative or merely stupid depends ultimately upon the acclaim of others. It does make sanity a relative thing, and renders our judgement on the poor souls who think a bit too straight to remember their manners or when to take out the garbage to be, well, the mere opinion of an idiot.

Incest

It's something you would never anticipate, which ironically is the origin of the problem. It may be said that anticipation is half the pleasure, though at times it may be thought of as all the pleasure. We know this from anecdote and experience. Consider poor Rob Petrie (Dick Van Dyke on the aptly named Dick Van Dyke TV show) eating a chocolate cake while absorbed in conversation with his wife. Pausing in mid phrase he said: "By the way, what is this, its delicious!" "You should know", she said, "That's your favorite dish, chocolate cake." Rob looked at the cake and cried out in horror: "Why didn't you tell me, I love that dessert!"

It may be argued that forgetting to anticipate a chocolate cake has a lot in common with learning not to anticipate it. After all, it may permit us to go about our lives undistracted by the myriad diversions of the world. Consider your kid sister, or your kid cousin, or the girl kid next door. Doubtless you would not want to kiss any of them or anticipate kissing any of them because you are not in the practice or 'habit' of doing so. But

is habit or the incidental correlations perceived while growing up enough to overwhelm the sexual 'drive' that makes no distinction between kith and kin?



Awful Kissing Act

Sure, providing of course you realistically define the concept of 'drive'. By realistically I mean of course the real circuitry, as in the wiring of our cerebral noggin that accounts for the incentives from food to sex to sexy cars that get us from A to B. When we think of drives, we think of indivisible mind states, hardwired circuits, or chemical imbalances that are present from the time we expect something to the time we get something. That is, looking forward to a pie in the sky is similar to eating that pie, wanting is the same as having. Both are driven by the same processes, and if the having is instinctive, the wanting must be equally so. This is a commonplace and commonsensical reasoning by layman and academic alike. It is also wrong.

In the last ten years neuroscience has demonstrated that 'drives' are bifurcated into two parts that are different psychologically and physiologically. That is, wanting is different from having (or liking), and each aspect represents different processes and corresponds to different laws. For the 'wanting' part, we feel alert, attentive, and pleurably primed for action and sustaining action. The 'having' part, where we imbibe, engorge, or otherwise consume the object of our appetite feels good in a different way, and does indeed represent a different thing.

The neuropsychological differences between them both are strikingly clear. The 'wanting' part reflects the activity of 'neuromodulators', brain chemicals such as dopamine that control alertness, attentiveness, and because they have affective value (i.e. they feel good), keep us on course. The having or 'liking' part engages neurotransmitters (opioids) that reflect gustatory, sexual, or other pleasures. Ironically, liking something or merely being aware that it tastes, smells, or feels good is not enough to spur behavior; one must also 'want' it. So how do you want? To wit, you must learn how to.

An interesting aspect about our wants, from food to sex, is that we want certain things at certain places and times. We don't want to eat ice cream before our main course, or pasta for breakfast (usually). And we don't for that matter want to kiss our sister, or any other playmates of the opposite sex either. And why not? Simple, because we never learned to, or more succinctly, never learned to anticipate or 'want' to.

When we are young, we hang around siblings or playmates in a decidedly non-sexual context. Unfortunately, when we come around eventually to recognize that sex is quite nice, contextual relationships or habits get in the way, so we don't get primed to anticipate a hot date with the girl next door. In short, we don't 'want' to because sexuality was something we learned to 'un' anticipate. Having to learn in effect to 'want' to do nothing

seems like a self-defeating thing. After all, shouldn't the prospect of having something be enough for motivation? Well, no.

The conundrum of motivation, and the inspiration for motivational speakers, is that objects alone do not motivate unless we learn to anticipate them. But anticipation can be a seemingly mindless thing. We nonconsciously infer meaning and motive from the simplest correlations, like a chair made favorite because we sat there often. And like a behavioral currency, such correlations can be tendered to new situations, giving them a new perspective that can dampen and reverse desire.

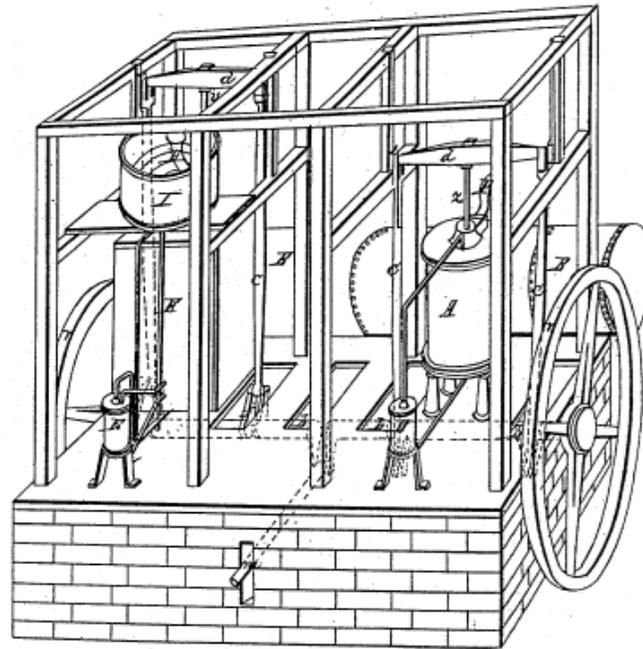
Oedipus learned that the hard way. Having discovered that he was married to his mother, he put out his eyes. As another literary example, Moll Flanders became instantly disinterested in her husband when she learned he was her long lost brother, and subsequently abandoned hearth and home. As literary sense would have it those events that you never anticipated would lead to never more anticipating!

To want without having is a necessary and pleasurable part of our lives, as our dreams keep us awake and aroused to the pleasures of the world. However, to have without wanting is to be listless, without material or sensual desire. Like a spandrel or superstition, it's an unexpected side effect of learning that innocent correlations can dull one's very desires. It's a better explanation for habits, good and bad, and when writ large to include the chaste experiences of youth, a reason for you to never, never, expect to kiss your sister.

Information overload

Sometimes the proper use of a product is ignored, owing not to a lack of

awareness of its effectiveness, but to a lack of an explanation of how it works. For example, in 1839, draping your bed with finely woven gauze curtains was thought to ward off malaria. Malaria, which means bad air, was generally considered to live up to its name, and be the literal result of well, bad air. Thus, hanging curtains around your bed presumably filtered the air, and thus helped prevent malaria. Nonetheless, going beyond mere curtain hanging to properly covering your bed with curtains didn't catch on until a proper explanation of malaria was at hand that suggested as a matter of course the preventative measure of mosquito nets. But this didn't stop another invention that stopped malaria just as well by treating it was thought, all that bad air. The invention was the inspiration of early 19th century Florida physician John Gorrie, who in an experiment sealed off a room and conditioned the air with a special device of his own invention. Of course, conditioning the air wasn't the cause of malaria, but it had the incidental benefit of cooling it, and air conditioning lived on because it made you comfortable, and not because the system incidentally didn't allow mosquitoes in. The explanation of mosquitoes as the carrier of malarial parasites resulted in the better use of available procedures that stopped mosquitoes, namely mosquito netting, and it provided the source of new procedures that stopped malaria (e.g. fumigation, swamp draining) as well as explaining why other procedures worked (e.g. air conditioning systems) and why other procedures of the day (e.g. handkerchiefs soaked in vinegar; garlic worn in shoes) that seemed to work, didn't.

Fig: 1.

John Gorrie's 'Bad-Air' Conditioner

Now consider a modern malady that doesn't kill you, but manages quite well to kill your time. This is the modern bane of 'information overload'. *"Information overload refers to the difficulty a person can have understanding an issue and making decisions that can be caused by the presence of too much information"* (Wikipedia). A logical problem with this definition is that we have always been in the presence of too much information, as a simple walk through any library can demonstrate. Before the internet, navigating this wealth of information was rudimentary and difficult. You used a card file to determine what you needed and walked around different book stacks to find it. Invariably what you found was often not exactly what you needed, but it had to do because the transaction cost for information, namely rifling through card files and roaming book stacks simply was too high.

In the internet age, our filters are immeasurably better, and we can get information tailored to fit our request, or employ intelligent agents that use a mere history of our internet behavior to find the information we need. Moreover, we can get this information for a negligible transaction cost, or for free. The problem is as any web search demonstrates is that we are handed with many *variations* of the same information, or information that is nearly redundant. In other words, different variations of the same information in different sites essentially restate the same information. For example, perform an internet search for 'high gas prices' and you will get a score of links to different articles that discuss high oil prices. If we were rational agents, we would read one or two articles and then cease, knowing that the marginal usefulness or utility of reading a third or fourth article decline markedly as they would restate the same information and generally arrive at the same conclusions. But the fact is we don't. Indeed, we may read many more articles on the topic and even far removed from the topic, and then come back to the web after a few hours to read more. The same goes for any matter of internet searching, whether it is social media, email communications, or just looking up a sports score.

Ultimately, the problem of information overload derives from the implicit assumption as to what type of information is actually overloading us, and what overloading means. To gain our attention, information must represent correlations between events that have a predicted value or utility. But information also possesses a degree of novelty, and it is the integration of novelty and utility and not utility alone that determine the importance or 'incentive salience' of moment to moment behavior^c. Utility and novelty are integral aspects of information, and even if information has low utility it still becomes an object of desire if that information is novel. Thus an individual may initially access his email

because its utility far outweighs the novelty of discovery, but by the fortieth time in the day that he checks his email, the novelty of the act far outweighs its utility. Moreover, even if we know the behavior has low utility, we often keep on searching. In addition, we are affectively primed to search for new information by in effect (or perhaps in *affect*) looking forward to accessing our email, social network, news feed, etc.

The concept of information overload implies that we are deciding between an abundance of information that is of uniform utility, but this is not true. Because of well honed filtering systems provided by the web, we can generally find what we need quickly. The problem is that the internet generates nearly redundant information that is distinguishable not by its usefulness, but by its novelty. In other words, *we are not overloaded with information that is primarily useful, but are overloaded with information that is primarily novel*. By generating infinite variations of the same information, the internet primarily generates not useful but novel information, and the overload is not in the information we want and need, but in information we want *but don't need*.

So the problem, as the example of Gorrie and his air-conditioner demonstrates, is that the 'information overload' like 'bad air' is false cause for a very real problem, mainly the web as a source of distraction rather than value. So the real solution is not to create better filters, since we can't or don't want to filter out variations of the same information, but rather to limit our access to the web to those times when we absolutely and not marginally need to be there. In other words, the solution is not found in better filters, but in merely draining the swamp.

The Irish Problem

In Ireland, it's all a matter of how you open your egg. Protestants and

Catholics have a different opinion on the matter. Catholics of course believe in the centuries old tradition of eating their eggs from the small end, while Protestants believe in bottoms up all the way. The problem is, eggs are a pretty big deal, and how you open your eggs determines whom you hang out with, and whom you wish to hang. This egg problem is a global one, as Moslems and Christians, Jews and Gentiles, Greeks and Turks, Hutus and Tootsies all have their own egg beliefs that they will permit no one to transgress. So groups of folks keep apart, tend their own fields, have their own separate sets of friends, and its all because of their eggs. Of course, most reasonable people believe that eggs may be opened any which way, but that leaves us with the problem of dealing with a century's old tradition of egg beliefs that have for millennia set in a wild bloodlust country against country, tribe against tribe, and neighbor against neighbor.

Thus I propose a modest solution to the Irish problem. Send out squads of secret police during the night and round everybody up. Then separate all able-bodied men and women from the children, the old, and the infirm. Bring them to a large stadium, and have some of them dig trenches paralleling the bleachers. Then divide them up into mixed groups of twelve or so, and lead each group out singly into the field. Then give the signal to the guards, and

PLAY BALL!

Thus we have the solution to the Irish problem: forcible baseball. Now of course the reader will naturally be skeptical of how team sports can eliminate ethnic hatreds that have lasted hundreds of years. Indeed, how can baseball resolve high-falutin' metaphysical issues that have set Catholics and Protestants at each other's throats for hundreds of years?

Because it wasn't deep thinking that set them at each other at all, as thinking had little to do with it.

Our cerebral noggins are after all limited in terms of the people and events they can perceive and model. Indeed, if we had to think about and feel for everyone and everything that was important, our heads would figuratively explode. So our brains simplify or parse the world, and mentally model only those events and individuals who we have to deal with to get through the day.

If there are only a few simple things we have to know about, then our world will seem simple, and we will act accordingly. I turn on the light switch and the light comes on, and ask a waiter for a menu, and get one. I don't however start thinking about the physics of electricity or the psychology of waiters because I don't have to. Because its not important, or will likely not signify its importance (as when the power fails or the waiter doesn't return), light switches and waiters become very simple things.

As the saying goes, out of sight is out of mind, and the further out of sight one gets, the more mindless one seems. For people, the further away they get from us, the simpler do their minds seem to be. So your wife is complex, your aunt less so, and when you get to your eighth cousin in Switzerland, he becomes a mere cipher. And of course, we can erase ciphers all day and still get a good night's sleep. Or as Stalin once said, the death of one person is a tragedy, but the death of a million is a mere statistic. When we lose perspective, individuality blurs, and people become as indistinguishable and mindless as a horde of stupid clucking chickens. Thus, if a million Irishmen, Hutus, or Chinese are slaughtered by their neighbors or are swept away by a flood or volcano, so what? They are a million miles away, think simple thoughts, have one track minds, and merely make clucking noises.

It is the trivial issues that form a folkway of isolationism that leads in turn to the eventual mores that make hatred honorable. When people are separated because of the color of their team jersey, an obscure tenet of their religions, or the side they open their eggs, they become social insects, single dimensional creatures with one-track minds. But force them together in a common cause and then they have to cooperate, know each other, and become human again. We become deep thinkers when people are represented to us as deep, as empathy follows when we have to be empathetic to survive. Otherwise, its easy to classify people and their motivations with simple minded metaphors that diminish them, and make them prey to equally moronic philosophies that sanction prejudice, hatred, and even murder.

So baseball's the key, or in truth anything that compels cooperation. If not, then life will always be us against the insects.

Note: In a similarly named essay, Jonathan Swift suggested that Irish children be roasted and served up for dinner like suckling pigs. It was to his great chagrin that a lot of people took him seriously, and actually approved.

Gould, Steven J.

In common parlance, an evil genius is someone who wants to take over the world. He has an agenda, an evil plan, and with a cackle wants to upset the applecart of the righteous. Evil geniuses are great for movies, are wonderful topics for popular history books, and are marvelous ways to mobilize the population, the troops, or the stock market. In the halls of academe though, evil genius is usually cause for, well, apathy. The answer is simple. Intellectual conquest usually occurs without muss or fuss, and if its easy to delude yourself that you are taking over the world

of academic or popular opinion, it's just as easy for others to ignore your smiling face on that book cover in an isolated corner of Barnes and Noble. Moreover, if bad intellectual thought is bereft of any concrete impact on our lives (like bad economic policy), and doesn't cause train wrecks, economic depression, or world wars, it just hangs around in the minds of a coterie of true believers, who generally ignore everybody else, including true disbelievers.

Sometimes though, a scientist comes along who has the intellectual wattage to attract a lot of readers, and to dispute popular intellectual ideas. It is here that intellectuals rise up like a horde of army ants to bite on the reputation of the evil genius who stomped on their hill. Such a writer was the late Steven Jay Gould. An eminent evolutionary biologist who just happened to be an eloquent essayist on biology, Gould perceived his discipline from separate perspectives of history, literature, and the arts. He advocated a pluralistic tradition, whereby knowledge was informed by many intellectual venues. Gould argued that it was impossible to have a monolithic perspective that gave precedence to one metaphorical perspective on how organisms develop and behavior, namely that everything had to be explained by natural selection, or survival of the fittest. Accident may have as much to do with the development of species as selection, and the idiosyncratic behavior of humans may owe more to the ability to learn than any inborn instinct.

Naturally, this was anathema to those Darwinians (e.g. Dennett, Pinker, Tooby and Cosmides, Dawkins) who saw evolution in everything, and Gould was roundly ostracized for not keeping the Darwinian faith. Now this writer is as attracted to bad psychology as a gourmet is to stinky cheese, yet bad psychology as well as bad science is characterized not by a Renaissance taste for an integration of general knowledge, but by the one track mind set that has given us fundamentalists of the religious, political, and now Darwinian sort. For a Darwinian or evolutionary psychology,

the one track of evolution has led to a mind that has many different tracks, or modules if you will, where the experience of millennia is engraved by evolution.

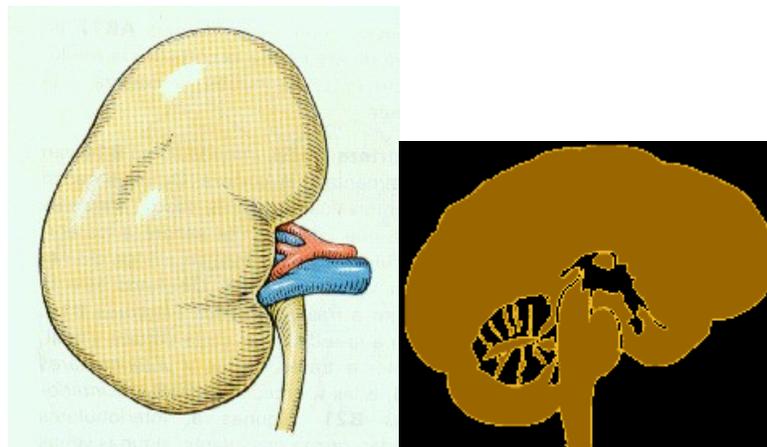
The core principle of evolutionary psychology is concept of 'massive modularity', which holds that the human brain has developed through evolutionary selection separate neural engravings or instincts to be altruistic, selfish, monogamous, ambitious, or misplacing the remote. Since postulating evolutionary modules rises above proof, as we can't go back in time to see how our ancestors evolved the tendency to misplace soup bones (in present times replaced with the remote control), it's as easy to be a evolutionary psychologist as it is to be a spinner of fairy tales. Gould said as much, and therefore lies his notoriety. Science is not necessarily a hard thing, but it does require a bit more than a healthy imagination. Perhaps that was Gould's evil genius after all, that he indirectly told us that genius does not come cheap.

Kidney Consciousness

Why am 'I' not my right kidney? I mean, why can't 'I' be my right kidney? After all, it's the same size as brain. It too does important and complicated things. It also has a cortex, responds to input from the body, and is connected to the body in intricate ways. So why am 'I' not a kidney, actively thinking kidney thoughts and pondering the nature of the blood supply among other things? Indeed, for any intelligent entity, there are lots of things to think about. We can ponder the permutations of all the atoms of the universe, read encyclopedias typed by monkeys, add, subtract, and multiply numbers into infinity. Life could be an endless computation, and we could revel in the details, or should we say, the fine print.

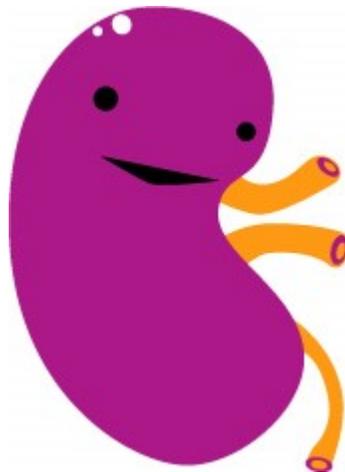
So with so much to think about, what makes the world of the kidney less privileged than that of the human brain? The kidney is an important organ as organs go, and does lots of complicated things to keep our bodies humming along. It's a mindless chore to be sure, but a self-aware kidney could do much more, be entitled to its own opinions, and at least have a say regarding things that effect it directly, such as whether to eat that last taco on your dinner plate. But alas it's not to be. The kidney is silent, an automaton that is unconscious of existence itself.

Brains of course are information processors, but even kidneys can process information. But the world for brains, or the persons that brains envision themselves to be is a lot more unpredictable than the world for kidneys. And to make sure we can handle this unpredictability, we must make the right choice ahead of time. So we must not only process information, but also model it. Actually, evolution has made us quite conscious of this fact, and we call it ironically consciousness. We are aware of the fact that we are aware, and we use our facsimiles of the future to predict the future and make for futures.



Kidney and Brain, Separated at Birth?

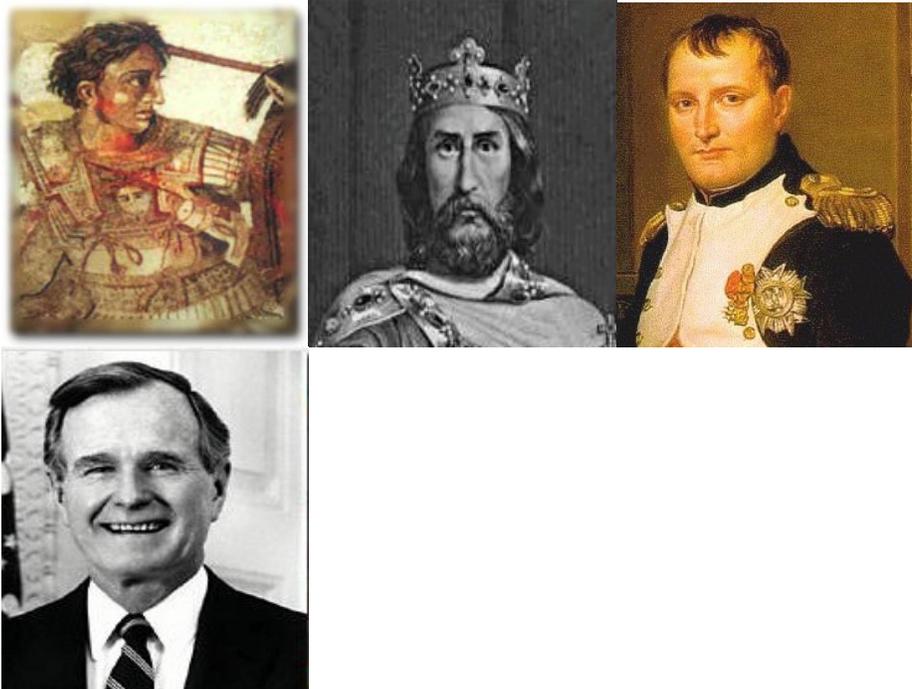
But of course not any future will do. We can spend our time counting atoms or drops of water in sea. But evolution has other purposes. So in its blind wisdom, we have been built not just to solve problems, or even anticipate them, but also to desire them. But these problems are only so if they contribute to our own survival as individuals and as a race. Thus counting raindrops is out, but counting stock options is in. The desirability of just desiring is something of a contrast to the simple materialism or hedonism that makes for car and beer commercials, where just having it all is just about all. Although houses and mates and endless buffets are fine things, and guarantee a life of ease and lots of babies, having it all is not quite the same as wanting it all. Consider that if our past was a Paleolithic Eden. We would have spent our time like a mindless vacuum machine picking up good things easily scattered about like so many dust bunnies. With such a non-challenge, the brain would have precious little to do, and would atrophy to the size of a dust bunny. That is, because it would thus have no mind for the future, it would wither as a mind, and become, well, like a kidney.



Perhaps God realized the importance of this after he tossed our original forebears out of Eden, and perhaps too he needed his own set of problems that would tax even His omniscience. So the wanting part is necessary, the one thing that we have to be conscious of, and perhaps it is a God given thing. And the having? Well, that's kidney stuff.

Left Handedness

They are the one's who had a hunger that was never satisfied, whose thirsts were never slaked, and who never stopped until in tears, they lamented of no more new worlds to conquer. They are the left handers who conquered the world!



Alexander the Great. Charlemagne Napoleon George Bush Sr.

Southpaws who itched to conquer!.

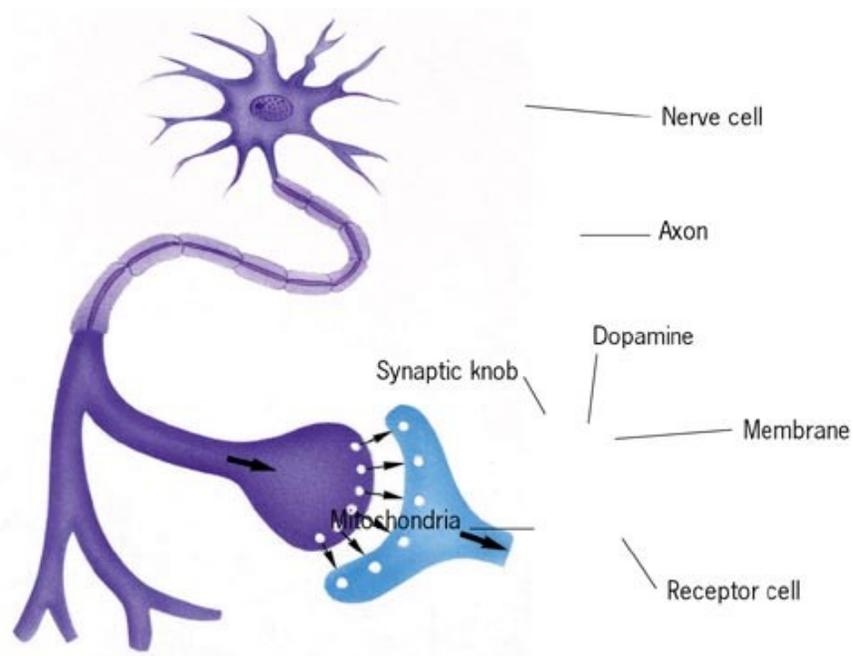
Only seven percent of the population, yet a constant source of speculation, myth, and irony. Look into their past and you can tell evolutionary tales of a special breed of novelty seekers, trouble makers who mercifully and perhaps thankfully are few in numbers. Construct your statistics just so, and you discover that they carry a spark of genius, an impatient temperament, a talent for trouble, and a penchant for dying young. Look to the future and they will become the hope and bane of society, discoverers and destroyers of worlds.

Are these tall tales, just so stories to entertain the young and naive? Sure. But does understanding how things had to be and how they may be tell us much about how they really are? Not really.

Consider an automobile. Knowing the general picture of how cars evolved and how they may be used in the future does not ultimately tell us much about cars. To do that, you have to take them apart and see how they work. And whether it is a left handed drive or having to drive left handed, the devil, as well as the explanation is in the details.

It's all a matter of organization, or axons really, the long extensions of brain cells that criss-cross the cortex of the brain like Amazonian vines. The brain has two frontal cortices, lobes of gray matter above your eyes. The left is for settled knowledge, the immutable facts of life learned since childhood. The right is for transient stuff, new and tentative knowledge. The memorable stuff eventually transfers to the left hemisphere where it becomes fixed in memory, like an heirloom of experience. The rest fades, and is forgotten as new experience interferes with and obliterates the old. Woven with the processes of memory is the incentive of value embedded in the things you remember. That is where those axons come in. The

metaphors and pictures that comprise our perceptions are caused by the activation of arrays of brain cells or neurons, and they are orchestrated to fire by neurochemicals that bubble from these axons like dew on a blade of grass. These neurochemicals, or neuromodulators (e.g. dopamine) are in turn elicited by the memory and perception of novel and important things. It is a marvelous and strange loop of self organization that engages brain and body, and makes for consciousness, memory, and life itself.



Axons in Action

It also makes for left handers.

Neurally, handedness is a specialized thing. For right handers, the left frontal cortex controls, and for left handers, the right. It's all a hardwired and heritable thing, and for the settled knowledge of handedness, the left hemisphere is up for the job. For left handers, its rather of an imposition.

The right hemisphere is like your dizzy aunt, always troubling to make sure that her hat is on right, or where she left her keys. To accommodate these new demands the right hemisphere accommodates the best way it can. It makes room for new receptors for the neuromodulators that spur our curiosity. In other words, to be left handed is to be more inclined to seek novel and interesting things. Whether advantage or handicap, to be left handed means to physically change the structure of your brain, and in turn to become a greater seeker of novelty, and perhaps by implication a conqueror of new worlds.

Whether left handers are destined to conquer the universe, die untimely deaths, be geniuses or cranks no one can say. And whether they were selected by evolution to give a creative spark to humanity, a counterweight to dull thinking is impossible to prove. Statistical inferences can after all be used to prove the earth square, and the selective processes of evolution are faded in rock, and are speculation at best.

It's all unknown really, and we should leave it like that. But we won't. Think of that when you by chance see someone scribbling avidly with a different hand than yours, and marvel at the possibility and destiny of a different breed of humanity.

Lifhacking

A distractive world does lots of bad things to our motivation, our intelligence, and our happiness. But even though we can't fathom the disease, each of its symptoms has a fathomable cure. So you tinker around the edges of our real problems, and come up with nifty procedures that like a set of wrenches in a tool box can be pulled out to solve any problem. This finds its most awful representation in the helpful hints articles that plague our discourse on human motivation. Indeed, a cottage industry

has popped up to take the little and consistent correlations of life and package them into the equivalent of a set of Philips screwdrivers. So rather than understand the system, we are content merely with hacking into the system, and making a fix is good enough even though it is not nearly enough. The problem with screwdrivers though is that you have to try quite a few before they fit, which leaves you fiddling about the tool box since you have no idea of how to explain your carpentry problem, which would of course narrow the choice of screwdrivers to one.

Now expand this metaphor to human motivation, and you come up with the popular concept of 'lifehacking'. Originally pertaining to short cuts computer programmers would use to be more productive, the same phrase has expanded to any sort of trick, shortcut, skill, or novelty method to increase productivity and efficiency, in all walks of life. Or, in other words, anything that solves an everyday problem in a clever or non-obvious way might be called a life hack^d. The problem though is that shorn of explanation, life hacking becomes itself a source of distraction. Ironically, it was the blogger Merlin Mann, an early adopter of lifehacking, who recognized this.

*One of the weaknesses of lifehacking as a weapon in the war against distraction, Mann admits, is that it tends to become extremely distracting. You can spend solid days reading reviews of filing techniques and organizational software. "On the web, there's a certain kind of encouragement to never ask yourself how much information you really need," he says. "But when I get to the point where I'm seeking advice twelve hours a day on how to take a nap, or what kind of notebook to buy, I'm so far off the idea of lifehacks that it's indistinguishable from where we started. There are a lot of people out there that find this a very sticky idea, and there's very little advice right now to tell them that the only thing to do is action, and everything else is horseshit. My wife reminds me sometimes: 'You have all the information you need to do **SOMETHING** right now.'*

For Mann, many of our attention problems are symptoms of larger existential issues: motivation, happiness, neurochemistry. "I'm not a physician or a psychiatrist, but I'll tell you, I think a lot of it is some form of untreated ADHD or depression," he says. "Your mind is not getting the dopamine or the hugs that it needs to keep you focused on what you're doing. And any time your work gets a little bit too hard or a little bit too boring, you allow it to catch on to something that's more interesting to you." (Mann himself started getting treated for ADD a year ago; he says it's helped his focus quite a lot. Mann's advice can shade, occasionally, into Buddhist territory. "There's no shell script, there's no fancy pen, there's no notebook or nap or Firefox extension or hack that's gonna help you figure out why the fuck you're here," he tells me. "That's on you. This makes me sound like one of those people who swindled the Beatles, but if you are having attention problems, the best way to deal with it is by admitting it and then saying, 'From now on, I'm gonna be in the moment and more cognizant.' I said not long ago, I think on Twitter—God, I quote myself a lot, what an asshole—that really all there is to self-help is Buddhism with a service mark.)^e

In my opinion, Mann is right on mark. Conforming to and far antedating our recommendations, Buddhist practices require not changes in the various styles of living, but a global change in life style. Like prayer in the western world, Buddhist mindfulness and meditative procedures require more than a little faith but are not dependent upon religious faith, yet for those who are beset by distractions; they are an answer to their prayers. As we have seen, science would tend to agree, but the science of distraction must necessarily emerge from an explanation of motivation, and it is explanation that compels.

Manners

Consider a world where nobody said please and thank you. Open a door for someone, and they will silently pass you by. Give a present to a relative, and they accept it without even a nod of appreciation. Help a little old lady across the street, and she will keep on going. Notwithstanding places like New York City, it's hard to imagine living in such a place and remaining the mellow and virtuous selves we consider ourselves to be. Without please and thank you, I shudder at what the world could become. Courtesy and simple kindnesses would disappear, and mankind would revert to his primal and selfish nature. We would all become, in a manner of speaking, assholes. Balderdash, you say? Well consider an environment where we can't say please and thank you, the open highway. Drive slow in a parking lot and on a street, and we can see the whites of other drivers eyes. With a friendly nod, we allow other drivers to merge and pass, and feel somewhat good about it. But get a driver behind you or travel at higher speeds, and if a driver intends to pass you or drives up close behind you, he has only his horn and lights to signal his intentions. Without a please or thank you, the scene can degenerate into road rage, and slow torture is not good enough for the ingrate tailgater or speeder who has imposed on you without scarcely a nod.

Highways are not virtuous places because we cannot make the virtual transactions whose subtlety makes for virtue. Please and thank you denote reciprocity or 'thanks, bud, I owe you one'. It keeps the accounting slate balanced, even though we know that we will never be able to collect on the minor favor of courtesy. The point is, virtue is its own reward because human beings can tally in their minds the VIRTUAL rewards of being good. And goodness is good because we don't recognize that it really IS the thought that counts. Evolutionary psychologists in particular find this hard to understand, and postulate (through mind experiments of

course) ancient scenarios where altruism evolved as a genetic trait to permit human survival. But this is no different than associating virtue with God's will or man's laws since it ignores the fact that realities can be in many places, more often than not made up in our own minds.

Humans can tally the debits and credits of assorted kindnesses when they can model the minds of other people. This is called empathy, and it develops through learning, or our socializing experiences with other people. Grow up in a world where everybody is empathic, and you'll be empathic too. There is no divine spark, no instinctive cause, no legalistic mandate to virtue, it is simply behavior that is paid for by a nod, both actual or imagined, to a simple kindness. It derives no less from our emulation of our world.

Logic

Read a newspaper op-ed column, or listen to a politician or self-help guru on any TV talk show, and if you possess even an ounce of gray matter, you will immediately know that in some small way, you are being conned. The con is almost always in when someone is trying to sell something to you, like life insurance, autos, or their well-considered opinion. Thus, when money's involved, particularly since it's coming from you as a paying consumer of such things like an education, utensils, investment, or self-help advice, you've got to be aware of the subtle traps of logic that can soon depart you from your well earned cash.

The following list of logical defects should be used as a checklist to guard against the simple logical tricks that can turn sound minds into Taliban militia trainees, or worse, Arthur Anderson consultants. Just refer to them next time you listen to a guest on Larry King, Oprah, or other talk shows, and you'll be amazed at all the leaps of logic and good sense that abound in the 'experts' of our day.

1. Completely Ridiculous Analogy

Example: Man evolved from apes. Therefore, I am justified in eating more bananas.

2. Bizarre Cause and Effect

Example: Taking a nap after drinking two liters of vodka will result in a hangover. Therefore, one should not nap.

3. I'll be the judge of that!

Example: I don't like neuro-psychology, therefore neuro-psychology is not important in psychology.

4. Ignoring how the brain works.

Example: People choose to go to rock concerts, eat Brussel sprouts, and give to the United Way because of instinct.

5. Equating popular opinion with reasoned opinion.

Example: If 500 million of our faith believe that women should run around on unicycles wearing gunny sacks and with flowerpots for hats, how can all those people be wrong?



Fashion Statements: A half a billion satisfied customers can't be wrong!

6. Silly syllogism

Example: Some behaviorists study animals. Some behaviorists study brains. Therefore, behaviorists are Godless republicans.

7. Phenom-illogic

Example: I know how headaches feel, therefore I completely understand headaches.

8. Level Confusion

Example: Water is two parts wetness, one part oxygen, and two parts hydrogen; or an emotion is one part feeling, three parts adrenaline, and one part the 'climax' of the movie 'Debbie does Dallas'.

9. Generalizations from one's own behavior.

Example: I'm not a clear thinker. Therefore, whatever you say will be confusing.

10. Argument by bizarre definition.

Example: He's not mentally ill. He just does things that are completely crazy.

11. Complete illogic.

Example: I enjoy meditating because I love baking pies.

12. Judging things without looking at options.

Example: Consciousness is due to life forces, and that's all I need to know.

13. Substituting famous quotes for common sense.

Example: Remember, if life hands you lemons, make lemonade. So you should happily muddle through life even if the only job you can find is at a local soda fountain, making lemonade.



Career options for the 21st Century

14. Anything you don't understand you can do easily.

Example: I don't have a high school degree, so how difficult could it be to be a psychologist and to influence millions? (author's note: actually, not that hard!)

15. Ignoring the downside risk.

Example: I know that climbing Mount Everest will ruin me financially and probably kill me, but its peak is worth the peak experience.

16. Irrelevant Comparisons.

Example: Psychotherapy for \$500 an hour is a good price, compared to the price of brain surgery.

17. Circular Reasoning.

Example: He behaves because he is intrinsically motivated, therefore he is intrinsically motivated because he behaves.

18. Incompleteness as logical refutation.

Example: Your theory of emotion does not address the question as to why dinosaurs went extinct, so it has to be wrong.

19. Senselessly ignoring the advice of experts.

Example: The experts say that you shouldn't eat twelve bags of potato chips a day and drink five six packs of beer, but I have my own theory.

20. Following the advice of known charlatans.

Example: That psychotherapist on the TV talk show said that happiness is just a matter of thinking happy thoughts! That must be right!

21. Reaching weird conclusions without any facts.

Example: Little Johnny is acting up. I am sure that is because space aliens have inserted a probe into his brain.

22. Misreading the lessons of history.

Example: He was convicted for bilking the public by advertising a phony water dunking psycho-therapy technique. I hope to be next in line to try it.

23. Failure to see the forest for the trees.

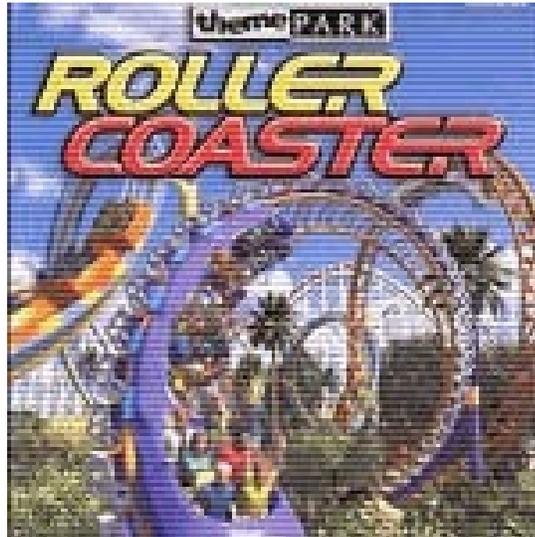
Example: The dog ravenously ate the pork chop, and the mutt in plain English even asked for more, therefore it is important that we further investigate the salivary response in dogs.

24. Overuse of parsimony (i.e. simple explanation).

Example: The simplest explanation for schizophrenia is demonic possession.

25. Ignoring all subjective evidence.

Example: I get a feel good experience while riding on a roller coaster, but since no scientific experiment has been performed on people riding roller coasters, we will never know if roller coaster riding is fun.



Is this fun? We may never know.

26. Judging the whole by one of its parts.

Example: Poverty causes depression. Therefore, we will all be happy if we were middle class, and in perpetual ecstasy if we were rich.

27. Smitten by the obvious.

Example: Healthy people live longer.

28. Relying on only one scientific method.

Example: One group of 1,000 people say they are happier watching Barney the talking Dinosaur than an equal number who had to watch George Bush speeches, therefore Barney would make a better president!



Barney: our next president?

29. Daydreams

Example: I get the best advice from the newspaper astrological column.

30. Taking things to their absurd conclusion.

Example: If you let them pull the plug on comatose and brain dead Uncle Remus, then the next thing you'll know they'll be processing you and me for the Soylent Green brand of people nuggets.



It's PEOPLE!!.....

31. Inability to understand multiple causes.

Example: The Behaviorist movement was useful for one reason only: It really understood how dogs salivate and how mice can learn to press bars for M&M's.

32. Failure to understand why honesty is the best policy.

Example: It should be ok to claim that hypnosis can make you levitate, just so long as folks don't attempt to do it after jumping out of skyscraper windows.

33. Proof by absence of facts.

Example: I've never seen you with a girl, so you must be gay.

Meme

Mimi was just a good idea waiting to happen, and when man began to think, Mimi felt right at home. Now Gene was a modest, relaxed, and undemanding sort who rarely called attention to himself. He built the mind that Mimi moved into, and scarcely complained when Mimi started to arrange his mental space in her image. Mimi was flexible, changeable, and rather flighty, and she could move about from one mind to another with breathtaking speed. Often, Mimi would move against Gene's better instincts, and sometimes Mimi would prevail, sometimes not. This was indeed a strange pairing. Whereas Gene loved to tinker about, and make over the eons Gene machines of wondrous diversity, Mimi was the very embodiment of philosophy, literature, and the fine arts. Gene loved hardware, whereas Mimi was always out shopping for the latest in software. Soon, as education opened up a vast Bloomingdale's full of ideas, Mimi began decorating the PC with dozens of ideas of every shape and hue. She lived for such things, and indeed wouldn't be without them. Soon her influence was overwhelming, and she made sure that any baby homo-sapiens would have the benefit of all her mental decorative ideas. Many of these ideas Mimi was quite fond of, as they encouraged the homo-sapiens to behave better, entertain itself better, and even to think about life without Gene and Mimi.

So the homo-sapiens now only lived to eat and reproduce, but to revered modesty, truth, and other humanly virtues, enjoy the music of Mozart, and wonder about the possibilities of existence without a physical body and mind. Gene became more and more a forgotten influence, as the purpose of man was merged into a symphony of ideas. Soon the whole world marked nothing less than this cultural legacy. The world was indeed made in his image, the image of his mind.



Mimi (pr: Meme)

Metaphor

What's in a word? A case may be made that without metaphors, we couldn't communicate a thing, and without understanding how to use metaphors, we end up communicating too many things.

Consider this excerpt from the 1948 comedy, 'Mr. Blandings builds his dreamhouse', where housewife Muriel (Myrna Loy) gives instructions to the contractor and house painter.

Muriel: Now, we'll talk about the painting. I had some samples. Now, first: the living room. I want it to be a soft green. Not as blue green as a robin, say, but not as yellow green as daffodil. Now, the only sample I could get is a little too yellow. But don't let whoever does it go to the other extreme and get it too blue. It should just be a sort of grayish-yellow green!

Mr. Delford: Aha ...

Muriel: Now, the dining room I'd like yellow. Not just yellow - a very gay yellow. Something bright and sunshiny. I tell you, Mr. Delford, if you'll send one of your workmen to the grocer for a pound of their best butter and match that exactly, you can't go wrong!

Mr. Delford: Aha ...

Muriel: Now, this is the paper we're going to use in the hall. It's flowered, but I don't want the ceiling to match any of the colors of the flowers. There's some little dots in the background, and it's these dots I want you to match. Not the little greenish dot near the hollyhockle, but the little blueish dot between the rosebud and the delphinium blossom. Is that clear?

Mr. Delford: Aha ...

Muriel: Now, the kitchen is to be white. Not a cold, antiseptic hospital white. A little warmer - but still, not to suggest any other color but white.

Mr. Delford: Aha ...

Muriel: Now for the carter room - in here - I want you to match this thread. And don't lose it: it's the only spool I have, and I had an awful time finding it. As you can see, it's practically an apple red. Somewhere between a healthy Winesap and an unripened Jonathan.

Mr. Delford: Aha ...

(The sound of tableware falling down is heard in the background)

Muriel: Oh, excuse me ...

Mr. Delford: You got that, Charlie?

Jack: Red, green, blue, yellow, white!

Mr .Delford: Correct.



Mrs. Blandings

In this excerpt the painter and builder weren't killjoys, they were just trying to get the job done. To clarify the problem they had to clarify the language. If not, then they could never have settled on the right shade of grey. Of course, this type of plain speak is aesthetically unattractive, and for those who think that the aesthetics of creation derives from the very language we use, the painters did a very bad thing. But by no means did the painters impose on Muriel's imagination. It is just that for imagination to carry well, it must be able to be copied. Thus for that matter, even Michelangelo's Sistine Ceiling must first be described by a billion pixels of different hues for us to adequately transport its higher values to a billion pairs of eyes.

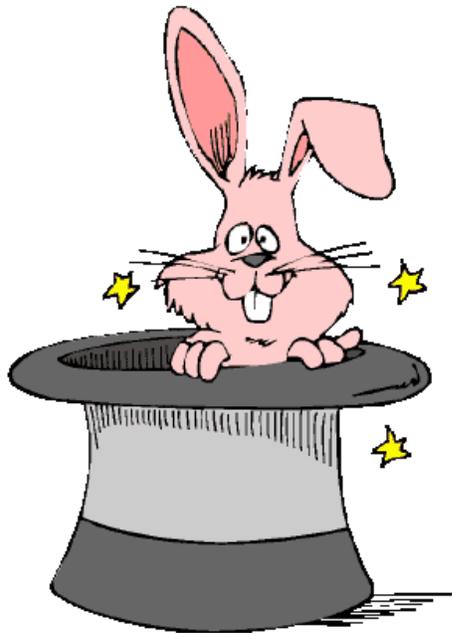
The problem comes from understanding how we use and misuse metaphorical speaking. A metaphor is simply an abstract property that is bestowed on a word that does not logically derive from that word. Hot passion, cold reason, consciousness raising, and flowing experiences don't

actually tell you what these experiences logically are as simple facts of behavior, but they sure as heck make those experiences seem a lot more special, and as explanations, a lot more marketable.

Which brings us to a class of psychologists and psychological thinking that has as much in common with the painting contractor, but with a whole lot less marketing sense. Like the painting contractor, behavioristically minded psychologists (or behaviorists) disregard all the colorful metaphorical attributes that we give to behavior, and just look at behavior plain and simple. So instead of good, bad, happy, sad, they simply look to the facts of how folks behave. That means of course that they paint a picture of the mind with the same rudimentary accuracy of the painting contractor, yet if they were to sell the doggone thing, they would have to return to Muriel's metaphors, and color the world as happy as a ripe apple. Of course, behaviorists continue to be loath to do this, and because they can't shift their metaphors on a dime, they remain a micro-dot on psychological horizon with many expertly painted but metaphorically bland houses for sale that even Mrs. Blandings wouldn't buy.

Mindfulness Meditation

Like nature, human nature is a subtle thing. Yet obfuscating the subtle things of life can be a source of entertainment, delusion or chicanery. It all depends upon one's ability for self deception or inclination to deceive. A stage magician knows this well, and obfuscates the subtle aspects of pulling a rabbit from a hat by a sleight of hand that obscures that there is literally something up his sleeve. The audience knows it is deceived, but does not know exactly how, and therein lies the magicians craft.



Like Magic!

For human nature, sleight of hand becomes sleight of mind, which as with any good trick, can be revealed upon close inspection. Consider the simple mental act of making a choice. Choosing is the cognitive act that leads to the decision to follow one route of action in preference to and in exclusion of other options, which are thus thus lost or deferred. But experiment and experience tell us that choices can be 'affective' things. That is, it often hurts when we make one decision to the exclusion of others. So what are the rules behind this? Consider this mind experiment. At the start of a working day, we drive to work. While driving, we lose the opportunity to go shopping, fly to Paris, or stay home and watch TV. Indeed, there are an infinite number of 'lost' opportunities, but we are hardly bothered by these losses and are scarcely aware of them. This is because these opportunity losses are predictable and unavoidable. But if

we change the underlying rules, affect occurs. Specifically, unpredictable and unavoidable or avoidable opportunity loss uniquely correlates with specific affective events. An unpredicted or 'counterfactual' loss that is unavoidable elicits pain that is interpreted as regret, yet if the loss is avoidable, then tension and anxiety also occurs concurrently with or as a precursor to regret. Moreover, these affective events occur even for slight or momentary losses. Thus, an individual who is choosing between cars to buy will know she will likely or surprisingly lose something or 'live to regret it', and will be anxious before and upon making a choice. Or if she makes continual decisions during a working day between work and internet surfing, these constant avoidable no win decisions or distractions will cause ongoing and ultimately exhausting tension. The emotional attributes of unpredictable and unavoidable/avoidable opportunity loss due to choice is known in modern social psychology as 'choice tyranny', where anxiety and regret is traced to abstract properties of decision making.

Enter the concept of mindfulness. Mindfulness is essentially a simple cognitive procedure that entails perceiving but not judging or choosing between the contents of experience, and results in pleasurable relaxation and enhanced alertness. But as such it renders all judgement suspect, whereas the evidence suggests that the operative cause for bad feelings is not reducing choice but in reducing an abstract aspect of choice. That is, it is not choice per se that causes uncomfortable affect, but rather how avoidable and predictable are the inevitable opportunity losses of making a decision. Thus, to be relaxed and alert, it will behoove one to radically eliminate, postpone, or reinterpret distractive or loss entailing choices rather than to avoid all choice. That is, if choice and its negative implications are made to be (through experience or circumstance) or are reinterpreted to be predictable and unavoidable, or are 'accepted', then relaxation occurs. Thus on a large scale or molar level if we accept the fact

that bad things happen, then like 'death and taxes', they will not disturb us. Similarly, on the small scale or molecular level, if we consistently realize that we will never access the internet at work, then we can never be distracted by it. Again, because we 'accept' the fact that we will not choose a distracting event at work, equanimity is restored

The essence of this analysis is that it maps the affective implications of decision to abstract aspects of experience that are non-consciously perceived, and are only imperfectly contacted by language. Thus it does not require the use of highly metaphorical descriptive languages, from Buddhism to Relational Frame Theory, that aim to account for decision making and affect. And herein lies the problem. Idiosyncratic data languages that imperfectly map to subtle yet clearly definable aspects of cognition and behavior end up obfuscating the issues at hand because they interject too many variables that do not clearly map to the facts at hand. Thus rivers of ink are spilled inferring a host of intervening cognitive variables that obscure the facts because they do not specifically map to any facts, and like a magician's meaningless tap of a wand or wave of a hand, make mindfulness into magic. Whether this is self deception or chicanery is hard to say, but perhaps only a magician would understand.

Motivation

The Most Stupid Motivational Story Ever Told

It was the archetypical pep rally, repeated no doubt since the days of Caesar and his legions, and probably countless times before. But at this time, this moment, it was being repeated in schools across the continent. And boy, was everybody pepped up! You know the routine. We can do it! We just need the will, the motive, the desire. Just repeat the mantra of

success and surrender to the enthusiasm of the crowd. Nothing can stop you if you really want it. And the reward was respect, prestige, and the right to shout from the roof tops: we're number 1!!!

So with mounting enthusiasm they all listened, and en masse marched off to earn their place in the sun. Unfortunately, what most of them earned was an unmarked place under the ground. It was August, 1914, the beginning of World War I, and the month of the can do attitude. Of course, a collision with reality can derail even the highest convictions. But in the meantime, we got motivation!



The Year of the Can-do Attitude

Now inspirational platitudes can be sometimes a good thing, as we need a little delusion now and then as we go down with the ship. But inspiration, if held by the gossamer thread of an unrealistic perception of the world, is a lemming's ideal. Unfortunately, in spite of our intellectual and cultural sophistication, we still follow the crowd, surrender to the metaphors of

God and country, and do as we are told. But in the meantime, as all of the pundits and self help guru's keep telling us, the question's not the thing, for all we truly need is motivation.

Optimism

If one were to define two conceits of the modern mind that form loops both trivial and profound, it would be the age of anxiety matched by the antidote of optimism. Of course, before the age of psychological euphemism people had much more reason to be anxious than the traffic/work/income tax challenged folk of today. Arguably, the difference between now and then is that needs for basic survival have been replaced by subtler insecurities ironically emerging from an age of leisure. Simply put, although we are magnitudes wealthier, more secure, and healthier than our ancestors, our reported happiness has been trending not upwards, but down. This of course belies the economic maxim that an increase in economic goods parallels a rise in psychological goods. In other words, if we're so rich, why are we so unhappy? The answer goes to the core of what unhappiness or happiness is. In a static sense, we all know the feeling, literally. It's an affective, emotional thing that we can allude to but not fully describe. In an active sense, we may not know it better, but at least it seems, well, actionable. In its simplest form, happiness is based ultimately on how one will perceive the world. To look 'optimistically' upon things is a cure seductive in its simplicity, and packaged with the rhetoric of psychology has become a veritable industry in itself. The better or bright side of things has been grist for a publication mill of self help books that essentially play variations of the same thing: namely the evocation and implementation of an optimistic way of life.

What is optimism? In the trivial sense, it is the cognitive act of appraising the increased likelihood of good things. Optimism energizes behavior,

focuses and sharpens thought, and in its exercise, feels good. Sometimes optimism arises when we realistically appraise our circumstances and competencies, and on other occasions it occurs when we purposively shade or distort our perception of the world. Self help maxims notwithstanding, it certainly is to our emotional interest to accentuate the positive; yet in all philosophy, whether the academic or popular kind, optimism never rises above euphemism to explanation. Ultimately, it is a matter of words, of defining one's terms. The French philosopher Voltaire said that all debate and confusion arise from failing to define what you're talking about. The controversy over the uses and philosophy of optimism is no different.

Profound Optimism

What is optimism? It is of course the appraisal of the high likelihood of good things, but optimism explained must implicate not just what we appraise, but how we appraise. Combined, they provide a new perspective of optimism that is simple and profound.

1. TO BE OPTIMISTIC IS TO BE UNCERTAIN.

We are optimistic that the sun will shine, but not that the sun will rise. To cohere to the logic of optimism, we can never be optimistic about things that are certain, for if we had perfect knowledge of all things past and future, optimism could never be.

2. OPTIMISM IS AFFECTIVE

The perception of a positive uncertainty, such as a raise, an accomplishment, or just a sunny day represents a transition from a lesser

to a greater likelihood that a good thing will occur, or in other words is a reconciliation of a prediction error that bodes future benefit. This estimation, whether of real (actual) or virtual (modeled) events is known to us respectively as good fortune or hope, but also has a very real neurological basis, namely in the heightened production of neurochemicals or neuromodulators such as dopamine that arouse and fix attention, increase the efficiency of thought, and subjectively, feel good. Moreover, the more good things we appraise, and the more important they are the better we feel, as we can shift our perspective from one good thing to another.

3. OPTIMISM MAY BE CONSCIOUS OR NON-CONCIOUS

The act of perceiving information does not necessarily entail a verbal or metaphorical label. Intuition, foreboding, or 'gut-level' feelings represent nonconscious estimations of the world that we are aware of not verbally, but emotionally.

4. OPTIMISM MAY BE GENERAL OR SPECIFIC.

We may be optimistic of success in all of our endeavors, or optimism may represent the likelihood of a positive outcome of a specific performance, or even aspects of a performance. Thus an individual may be optimistic about 'life', about his success in a game of chess, or about a move in chess.

The fact that optimism must be defined by affective (how we feel), cognitive (how we think), and behavioral (what we do) criteria removes it from the breezy linguistic usage as a mere metaphorical artifact or thing, and provides a unifying explanatory basis for the many metaphorical species of pleasurable behaviors or behavior sets that are optimistic to the core. For example, whereas optimism may reflect a generalized appraisal of likely good things, 'obsession' or 'passion' may reflect our heightened arousal when these good things are extremely important, and 'interest'

may reflect the moment to moment or molecular appraisal of likely plot twists in a novel, inspiring ideas to an artist, or winning moves in athleticism, and may vault to 'peak' or 'flow' experiences when those moment to moment events are important and continuously perceived.

In all of these shades, optimism represents wanting, the moment to moment estimate of having. But wanting is nonetheless separate from having in all of its aspects from the physiological to the psychological, and ironically, is viewed by behaviorist and biologist alike as the very stuff, the essence of reinforcement.

The Inversion of Reward

In economics, reward is a natural thing, and is essentially and simply described. But in psychology, it has of late become a doubtful and even notorious thing, because as we have noted, happiness does not correlate all too well with material wealth. According to the 'methodological' behaviorism of B. F. Skinner, reward is a discrete instance where we have obtained something, and is scarcely different from the economic model that indexes well being to the accumulation of things, whether measured by individual possessions or GNP. Yet modern biological and radical behaviorisms have inverted this maxim to equate reward or reinforcement with 'wanting', and not 'having'. These discrepancy based models of reinforcement or reward equate reward with the positive apprehension of choice that in simple terms is no more than optimism.

The implications of this are profound, yet have scarcely been plumbed. If wanting, not having, is the essence of value, then it matters little what we have than how we want it. To prolong and accentuate positive desire, whether known as ambition, hope, or flow or simply looking forward to a new day puts psychology square not against behaviorism, but economics.

It shall be interesting to say the least to see how these new perspective will bode for human happiness and the future of the race.

Patton, George S. (300bc-1945ad)

It was 1944, and times were tough all over. These were hard times for the workers of the Himmler Machine Works factory. There was negative energy everywhere. Production was down for Tiger tank tops, the Panzerfunwagen SUV, and the V-2 vacuum cleaner engine. The Mr. and Messrs. Schmidts of the Greater Reich were simply not buying, and there was a real fear that these products would simply bomb out, or just get bombed. In spite of doubling the moldy crust allowance for their immigrant guest workers, and the placement of motivational slogans like 'Work will make you free' on the barbed wire fences and guard towers, worker productivity continued to fall, with ominous results for product quality.



Own the road and a few small countries in your Panzerfunwagen SUV

Something had to be done to get the workers concentrated at their campus. Thus there was great anticipation when motivational consultants Marv Slugman and Micky Czikenfri arrived to get the workers into the flow again. As leaders of the Positivity School of psychology for the Jung at heart, Marv and Mickey went to work like busy beavers, and interviewed all the workers, who candidly revealed under the watchful eye of their guards that their malaise was due to not enough positivity in their work. They were simply not looking at the bright side of things, such as the evident promotional opportunities due to weekly worker turnover, the free room, board, and showers, and the fact that they were helping their company to achieve world market domination. Marv and Mickey helped the factory commandant set up better employee selection procedures to choose workers with high positive attitudes as they arrived at the train station, and then got the rest in the mood with positive affirmations, positive thinking, group whistling of Disney tunes, and delusional training sessions.



Positive Psychologists Patton and Slugman

Sadly, it was too late for the Himmler machine works, as foreign competitors made a hostile take over. As the American auditing firm of Patton, Eisenhower and Zhukov inspected the new properties, they summarily lined all the higher and lower management they could find, and had them summarily fired by a squad rounded up for that very purpose.

And as for Marv and Mickey, they remained positive about the experience, and applied their wisdom in the American workplace, which soon became the happiest and most productive in the world.

Peer Review

We know that as children we resisted taking our medicine not because it wasn't good for us but because it didn't taste good. Of course, as children we don't have the wits to rationalize that our distaste for medicine is other than a literal distaste. We like to think that as adults we are above all this,

and can rise above a little discomfort to know what's good for us, and figuratively take our medicine. This is presumably the case in the rarefied world of academic debate, where a group of your academic peers reviews your argument with a dispassionate and objective eye. This process is aptly named peer review, where a jury of your intellectual equals decide whether your term paper/journal article/book is up to snuff, or whether it should be snuffed out.

But this is the type of hanging jury that will hand you your head if you just look at them cross, or cross them up by saying something that makes them look foolish or just plain wrong.

This was argument of the sociologist Michael J. Mahoney of Pennsylvania State University, who was one of the first to examine how well the peer review process works in evaluating scientific papers. In a landmark study(see peer review), he sent copies of one paper to 75 reviewers but doctored the results so that in some cases the research appeared to support mainstream theories, while in others it ran against them.

"When the results ran contrary to the reviewer's theoretical beliefs," Mahoney reported, "the procedures were berated and the manuscript was rejected. When the results 'confirmed' the reviewers beliefs, the same procedures were lauded and the manuscript was recommended for publication."

Mahoney's findings struck a nerve. Within three months after he presented his results last year at a meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, he said, he "received probably 200 to 300 letters and phone calls from scientists who felt they had been victims of that kind of discrimination."

The problem is that when theoretical perspectives are informed hunches, who is to say your hunch is better than mine? Thus it's easy dismiss a

competing hunch by merely saying that although the data is there, the right hypothesis isn't. For example, if your great paper notes that rats running a maze will take a left turn to get at the cheese because it's hungry, although your data may be above suspicion, your hypothesis of a hungry rat may not. So the reviewer in his damning repartee will dismiss your paper by remarking that your paper tragically errs by not confirming the well known fact that cosmic rays cause changes in maze navigation.

Mahoney's point however was that a hypothesis drawn from experimental data has nothing to do with the quality of the data itself. Thus it's easy to throw the proverbial baby out with the bathwater by discarding the data because it can lead to uncomfortable conclusions. So what's the solution? Namely make conclusions that are safe, or don't make any conclusions at all. In other words, just have the facts, and not you, speak for themselves. This is called inductive reasoning, and is safe, boring, uncontroversial, and hardly the stuff of great science. But it gets you published, which at least provides tenure if not a Nobel Prize.

The plain truth, or should I say likely hypothesis, is that we tend to reject stuff because it's just plain uncomfortable. In the real world, we can't escape making bad decisions. This is called the school of hard knocks, and we realize that taking our medicine is after all good for us. However, in the academic world, if you support a bonehead hypothesis you can withdraw not only from painful theories that challenge it, but also from the painful facts that don't support it, and wile away your time counting angels on pinheads in the company of your fellow true believers. This underscores an even greater problem, as uncomfortable arguments regardless of their basis in fact are not only shunned by individual academics, but also by the very provisos of the professional journals that represent their collective opinion. Thus if you want to make a reasoned argument against psychoanalysis, behaviorism, or evolutionary psychology in one of their journals, a rejection is not only in the cards, it's

in the RULES. Thus no argument gets settled because no questions get to be raised, let alone discussed. Thus everyone talks past each other rather than to each other, and academia becomes not just an ivory tower but a tower of Babel.

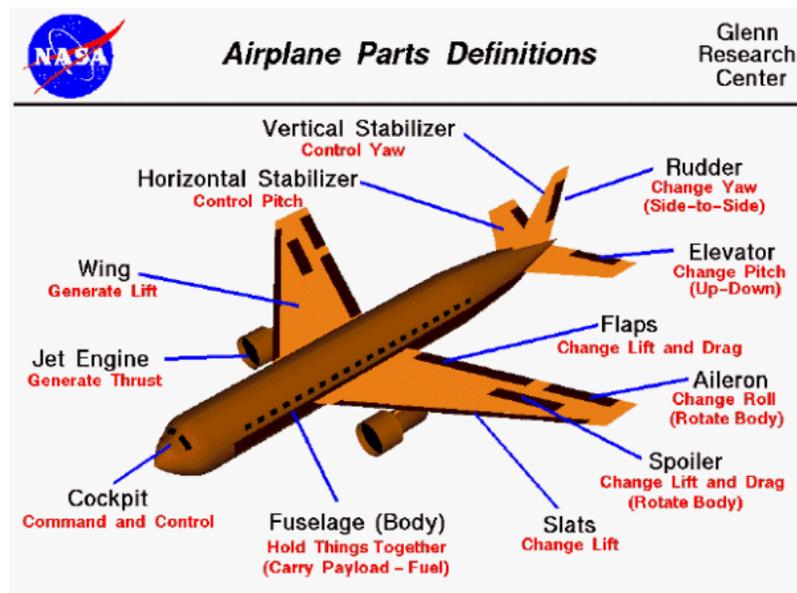
Pinker, Steven:

Steven Pinker's: 'How the Mind Works'

Could this be the Worst Book Ever Written on the Human Mind?

Yup!

Let's say you are a space alien on the moon busily engaged in observing human beings and their various aircraft. You write a book on aerodynamics wherein you provide a mathematical model of computation that describes the outward behavior of what you see. But in the introduction of the book you claim that you can model the flight of planes, rockets, and balloons without any need to consider air. Of course, aerodynamics without air is as stupefyingly dumb as claiming to understand the mind without understanding the neuronal basis of the brain. But this is what Pinker does in his book, and even trumpets the fact!



This explains an Airplane, you don't even need air!

Thus to quote Pinker: "This book is about the brain, but I will not say much about neurons, hormones, and neurotransmitters. That is because the mind is not the brain but what the brain does... That special thing is information processing, or computation." (p.7)

In other words, by saying that the mind is what the brain does, Pinker neglects to define the brain! By reverse engineering the mind, and attributing behavioral functions to wholly inferred computational modules somehow selected by evolution, Pinker neglects the massive corpus of findings in neuro-psychology that have in painstaking detail examined the motivational systems in human and mammalian brains. In particular, the sub-cortical systems that are critical for the generation of human emotions and human motivation are not 'computational' by any stretch of the imagination, and must be incorporated in any model of how the brain actually works. Without this, understanding the mind is impossible. Nonetheless, Pinker wears his ignorance like a badge, a badge

that discredits his own argument even before its substantive products are considered.



When pressed on the issue Pinker responded:

"Neurons? Neurons? We don't need no steenking neurons!!"

Pinker of course adheres to commonly held viewpoints in evolutionary psychology that postulate behavioral mechanics through an appeal to historical selectionist pressures spanning eons. However, evolutionary assumptions as to 'why' we behave (e.g. being chased by hungry bears, or chasing hungrily after females) do not logically entail an understanding of 'how' we behave. It may be matter of instinct or learning, or an unknown mixture of the two that may change with time and circumstance. That we don't know this, and more often than not cannot know this is demonstrated in the interminable and tediously tendentious arguments over nature vs. nurture that over populate academic and popular discourse on psychology. Indeed, by utterly ignoring neurobiological perspectives that describe the workings of the brain in detail, the goal of explanation is rendered well nigh impossible. Pinker's metaphor of

reverse engineering does not serve understanding because explanations go far beyond the mere functionality that such engineering sub serves. For example, I may reverse engineer a washing machine by installing at its core a nuclear engine, a steam engine, an electric engine, or mere foot power. With any of these schemes, I can design a machine that cleans clothes, but I can never explain a washing machine until I take it apart.



Is there a nuclear or steam engine module running this thing?

So poses Steven Pinker in his next major book: "How Our Appliances Work."

Thus Pinker's argument, and every argument for that matter that derives root and branch from evolutionary psychology can never explain how the mind works because it is logically incapable of explanation! So where are we to look for an explanation? Not in socio-biology, as Pinker would have it, but rather in good old biology. Indeed, affective neuroscience, a branch of neuro-psychology that embraces explanatory perspectives, is wholly informed by evolutionary principles, yet because it is based on a biological understanding assigns much more of our behavioral repertoire to a complex interaction between general purpose neocortical structures

and basic emotional systems arising from mid brain systems. In other words, behavioral tendencies are not ingrained in our brain like the bee line a honey bee makes to a flower, but come from complex interactions between brain systems that cannot be 'reverse engineered', as Pinker would have it. Rather, you have to 'go into' brains and have a look.

In common with nearly all practitioners of evolutionary psychology, Pinker accepts the metaphor of the mind as a modular computational device. But the more credible view arising from neuro-psychology is that this is false. Evolutionary psychologists have rightly dismissed creation 'science' because the latter blatantly ignores the overwhelming facts of evolution. The great emerging irony is that neuro-psychologists are rightly dismissing much of evolutionary 'science' because it ignores the facts of the brain.

And this is why Pinker's book is the worst book ever written on the human mind. Not because of a lack of intelligence, style, creativity, or wit, but because of hubris that psychology cannot afford. And indeed, if there's anything that antagonizes the gods, as well as this writer, it's a prideful arrogance that thumbs its nose on the facts, and this book, by building its case in large measure on conjecture, builds its case on sand.

Political Correctness

Modern Americans are a sorry lot, namely because they feel they continually have to say they're sorry. Nowadays, it is the correct and fashionable thing to ask forgiveness through paying reparations, erecting monuments, establishing national holidays, granting preferences, designating parking spaces, and even renaming the title of the race. But does such penance serve to change behavior, or merely to excuse it?

Inquiring minds want to know. After all, if people can really change their hearts and minds through symbolic acts of contrition, mankind would be improved immeasurably and on the cheap. Peace on earth and goodwill towards men, and all for the price of a designated holiday or two! Unfortunately, symbolic gestures are small and incremental things, and like eating a cream pie each day, you won't know that cream pies add something to you until months later when as a rotund gelatinous mass you crash through the floorboards of your house. Likewise, if you want an era of brotherly love, it's important to know if changing a street sign will inspire good feelings and good deeds that will accumulate in time.

So how will we know if PC is good for us? A good way to find out is to take a cue from the long suffering little creature that has indirectly warned us of the evils of nicotine, overeating, and saturated fat, the laboratory rat! Feed rats their body weight in saccharine, and if they die next week of cancer or tooth decay, or just explode, we will know it is all due to artificial sweeteners. Just give them heaping helpings of whatever you think may be good or bad, and they will tell you soon enough. Unfortunately, rats do not respond to honorifics, compliments, knighthoods, or rat reparations, hence we have only Homo-sapiens as a proper experimental subject. Of course, since people are generally an impatient lot, we need to find out fast whether our golden age is just an affirmation away.

So, to quickly discover if PC is the way to Utopia, we should pile on the things that will make us feel good, or at the very least, sorry for ourselves. We can start by renaming ourselves. Indeed, why must we be just Americans when we can divide ourselves up into ethnic groups? After all, give or take a few hundred wars, pogroms, and massacres, the Germans, French, Russians, and English among others have lived in Europe in peaceful harmony over the centuries while relishing the superiority of

their individual identities. The Negroes were the first to get it right. Why use that bland and offensive moniker if you can be an African-American? Better yet, why not employ an even better respect getting title like Royal African-Americans with Distinction? Following this precedent, why not make a name for yourself by renaming yourself? Similarly, why be a mere Caucasian when you can be a European American, a German American, a Florida State American, or a blood-donor, hearing challenged, lesbian, Armenian American? Moreover, why be burdened with responsibility, accountability, and some antique sense of sin? It's a softer and altogether preferable fate to be challenged rather than handicapped, to be misguided rather than evil, or to be uninformed rather than stupid. We can define everything away except death and taxes, but even that will yield to the power of semantics.

And when we have redefined ourselves, we will all likely revolt, trash all the fancy names, and become just human beings again. This ironically is where we wanted to be all along.

Ponzi Scheme

It is projected that in the year 2035 the increase in traffic in the Los Angeles area will finally overtake the capacity of the road system to move it. Then it will all stop. By 2050, the population of the state will almost double to 60 million. Presumably by this time not just all traffic but all movement will stop. That is when we discover the joys of walking. Of course, you can fit 150 million of so people in an area the size of Iowa, and they will survive, sort of. That's Bangladesh for you. The only problem is that you will live in a hut, walk to work, and be literally and continuously rubbing shoulders with your neighbors.



The Day the Traffic Stopped

For us to envision that nightmare scenario is to presage the collapse of society, if collapse is defined at the exponential increase of inconvenience. Ironically, it is our search for convenience that will get us there. To get places faster, to do things easier, and all of it with ever increasing simplicity and ease is the hallmark of technological progress, but comes at the cost of ecological destruction and the ever increasing delegation of inconvenience to a growing underclass.

The problem is that if everything becomes convenient, convenience is lost. And it won't be because of expanding technology, but expanding numbers of people. That's because exponential convenience require more people to turn down our beds, pick our strawberries, and mow our lawns.

Like a Ponzi scheme, to get to our exalted level of convenience, we need to make inconvenient the lives of an underclass of folks who will do all the grunt work. Indeed, if we didn't have a growing underclass to do all the work and all the make work, society would 'collapse', which is another way of saying that life would be relatively more inconvenient when faced the prospect of mowing our own lawns and making our own beds.

But underclasses have a way of moving up the the economic chain, thus demanding an even larger underclass to pick vegetables, wash our cars, and mind the kids. So with a surge in immigrant labor, the population explodes, and as berry pickers migrate up the economic ladder to become SUV pickers, we need a larger and larger underclass to support the pyramid. There is invariably a limit to this, when all the traffic stops.

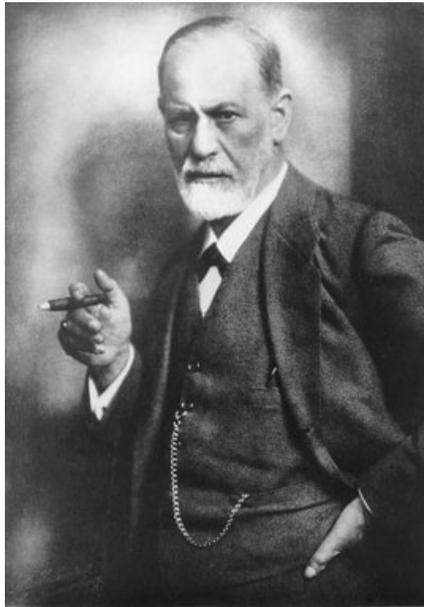
But do we need to go that far? Collapse occurs when a society consumes its own seed corn by over population that results in depletion of its natural resources, with the result that everybody dies, or worse, eats each other. This sort of thing happened on Easter Island and with Mezo-American Indians. It is unlikely of course that society will ever develop a taste for soylent green (IT'S PEOPLE!), but there is another solution.

Ultimately, if the law of social dynamics means the price of convenience is the exhaust plume of a lot of inconvenience shunted to someone else, it makes sense that that someone else is in Never Never land. Take up space on a road and invariably you will block someone in the passing lane, but if you're virtually on the road, you can widen the highway with an eye blink, or with a press of the A button on your keypad, blow the traffic ahead to bits. Make convenience virtual and you take your ease entirely in your mind's eye. Thus as the world teams with people abutting each other cheek by jowl, our homes will become Nintendo-ized, and we will abandon ourselves to limitless virtual pleasures, including no doubt many empty roads.

Popper, Carl

Sigmund Freud and the Cigar

or, Karl Popper's guide to scientific goodness.



A Woman is just a woman but a good cigar is a smoke."

Plato, 350 B.C. (or was it Rudyard Kipling?)

Sigmund Freud was once asked about the psychoanalytic significance of his smoking a cigar, to which he replied that a good cigar was merely a smoke. This of course repeats Plato's claim, the accuracy of which the author challenges anyone to disprove.

Which of course is exactly the point.

Smoking a cigar because it tastes good is easy to prove, but smoking a cigar because of some narcissistic, libidinal, or other impulse is not. The 'tastes good' hypothesis is easy to demonstrate, takes little space and time, and makes sense. However, the 'because I have an innate need to blow

smoke rings' hypothesis however is not easy to demonstrate, and takes a lot of time and effort to demonstrate, if indeed that's at all possible. However, time and effort translate into a lot of debate, numerous journal articles, and podium time for psychologists, which is a good thing for psychology careers. Unprovable hypotheses are compelling things to psychologists because they can multiply like bunnies, and keep social scientists scribbling away for eons as they try to demonstrate the modern equivalent of the age-old conundrum of how many angels (or impulses) can dance on the edge of a pin. Provable arguments on the other hand are easily resolved, and often involve simple explanations that don't get much airtime or library space. Thus, unprovable ideas seem to be much better things for thinkers who aspire to be great, as if greatness is denominated in the ability to generate lots of hot air and blow logical smoke. But there have been spoil sports who would rain on this endless parade of great thinking. One of them was the distinguished philosopher of science Karl Popper.

Popper recognized the value of the unfalsifiable hypothesis to be nonsense early on, and rightly claimed that if you don't have the means to prove a hypothesis false, then your hypothesis ain't science. The problem though it who is to say your hypothesis isn't provable? Take such elusive things as gravity waves and unicorns. Gravity waves are awfully difficult to detect, and require super expensive equipment and a lot of patience. Unicorns also are awfully difficult to detect, and likely may require super expensive equipment and a lot of patience. Of course, for all its observational difficulty, gravity waves do fit Popper's criteria, and unicorns do not. And the reason is simply that gravity waves and the mathematics that describe them derive from disprovable mathematical descriptions (namely Einstein's theory of relativity) of nature, whereas unicorns come from fairy tales. Fairy tales occur when we are simply imagining things, but unfortunately for psychology, a lot of reasons for

our behavior occur because we are imagining things. And that's the problem with psychology. Human nature has historically been a maddeningly difficult thing to understand because we don't have tools at the ready like microscopes and telescopes that can delineate in detail how minds actually work. Thus, although we note behavior and the contexts that shape behavior, the actual workings of our cerebral noggins has been up to now hidden from view. From the beginning of philosophy up to the present day, the solution has been to hypothesize metaphorical mental modules that account for the idiosyncrasies of behavior. Thus we have such things as virtue, will power, desire, etc. that act like linguistic gizmos that hook up stimulus to response. Lately, evolutionary psychologists have muddied things up even more by supplementing metaphorical literary gizmos with metaphorical computational gizmos that represent action tendencies that are physically imprinted in the brain. This has caused psychology to become an even greater mess than before, as now we have computer metaphors mixing it up with our poetic ones.

Meanwhile, in the shadows hard-nosed and provable explanations of behavior rustle about like prehistoric mammals scurrying under the legs of the brontosauri of academic schools of thought. Thus simple explanations bide their time as the sauro-pods of humanists, cognitive scientists, and evolutionary psychologists fight it out for dominance in the jungles of academia.

As we now know, it took a meteor to clean out the ecosystem, and allow truly intelligent mammalian life to evolve and flourish. Luckily, a conceptual meteor is already zeroing in on the planet academe, and will also soon clear away the jungle of psychobabble. This meteor is called behavioral neuro-science or bio-behaviorism, which is merely a fancy way of describing how brains actually work, and how working brains (and the bodies they are connected to) cause behavior. Conceptual metaphors have occurred often in science, and follow the introduction of new instruments

that allow us to see how things really work. Galileo's telescope and Pasteur's microscope are two examples of instruments that opened the door to level headed and falsifiable explanations that kept verbiage laden philosophers of the day gainfully employed. With the prospective introduction of new and simple explanations for behavior, evolutionary, humanistic, and cognitive psychologists will have to look for a new line of work, to which this author suggests a career in politics.

Procrastination

Procrastination seems at first to be a unique human attribute, but I think it is universal to all things with at least half a brain. It is in other words something more ancient, a byproduct of evolution. Thankfully, there is no need to postulate a dawdling gene, as an evolutionary psychologist would be wont to do. Actually, I propose that it is a spandrel, an unexpected and unintended consequence of how our brains are made up to make up their minds, in this case at the last minute.

Consider this. If I prepare my income taxes, buy Christmas presents, and take out my garbage, all with days to spare, all the good things entailed by this behavior would be certain, and may arrive earlier (like a tax refund) to boot. However, doing these tasks at the last minute makes the arrival of these good things a bit more uncertain, as when we finally make it under the wire, we are usually pleasantly surprised. Which is exactly the point.

Ironically, certainty is a matter of dread, or at least for dreadful boredom for almost all living things that need to walk, scurry, or scuttle about. The fact is, we are wired to be sensitive to positive and uncertain things. Called a seeking or foraging response, it simply entails that when we encounter or anticipate positive and surprising things, the brain will

release neurochemicals (dopamine, mainly) that will perk up and center our attention, and provide an affective valence (i.e. it feels good) that gives extra value to what we are doing or thinking about doing. Without it, we would be bored, indifferent, and will end up shuffling about endlessly without purpose, or in other words, dawdling. Procrastination is thus our unconscious way of adding a little uncertainty to the daily and certain things that make up the drudgery of daily existence.

So the next time you are scrambling to catch a plane, running an errand for the wife, or just getting to work on time, understand that procrastination is quite literally the neural equivalent of the spice of life.

Psychobabble

If you think modern life is much more complicated than in past generations, you're only partly right. Actually, it's modern vocabulary that's gotten more complicated, and all those new words have been happily arranged by our leading psychologists and other 'deep' thinkers into an infinite permutation of grand concepts, theories, and other all encompassing explanatory devices that aim to explain why we behave in the cantankerous ways we do. This new psychological liturgy can only be understood by the self elected priesthood of psychologists, who like modern Humpty Dumpty's explain the way we are because that is of course the way we are.

Got that?

Well, who says that we can't be like Humpty Dumpty, and redefine the world with nebulous truisms? Clear thinking requires the use of words

which have clear and distinct meanings.



Patron Saint of Modern Psychology:

A Good Egg, particularly when scrambling words, or just scrambled.

However, when clear meaning is perverted with words which have a multitude of meanings of no clear meaning at all, we have 'psychobabble'. Psychobabble is something we can all find of very great value, since we can use it as a nifty replacement for thinking, and we all know that in this fast paced world, who has time to think? Through the selective use of psychobabble in social situations, we can definitely settle, or at least fog over many pressing personal problems. Psychobabble just sounds important and definitive, and as we all know from our own experience, if something sounds important and definitive enough, it must be true.

In the spirit of our times, I offer a psychobabblic interpretation of many of the very cryptic phrases we often utter to mark a particular psycho-sexual

situation. Although this is the next best alternative to the truth, it is a wonderful compromise on the cheap!

Plain talk and its Psychobabblic Interpretation

Plain Talk: Boy! I would really love to hop your bones!

Psychobabble: I would enthusiastically elect to reach a penetrating connection with your entire being!

Plain Talk: How about a date?

Psychobabble: Would like to form a dyadic pairing to enforce expansive issues related to interpersonal growth and sex appeal?

Plain Talk: Not tonight, I have a headache!

Psychobabble: Your effort to force premature intimacy without consideration of my fragile ego state and low physical lability has resulted in this hysterical conversion reaction that will soon devolve into a punch in the nose if you don't lay off!

Plain Talk: I love you!

Psychobabble: Because of a history of mutual reinforcement and the facilitation of neural norepinephrine linkages due to my prevalent psychobiological reactivity to your bodily curvature and select bulges, I would prefer to engage with you in a variety of intercoursures, both social and otherwise.

Plain Talk: Hello! My name is Bob. What's yours?

Psychobabble: Hi! Would you like to participate in an exchange of self referential nomenclature leading to a progressively heightened plateau of

mutual interpersonal discovery, dating, and salacious behavior?

Plain Talk: I think we should be dating other people.

Psychobabble: The progressive atrophy of my unconditioned positive regard for you has weakened irretrievably the positive valences which previously facilitated pair-bonding and conjugal arousal. Thus, I suggest that we escape our personal orbits by following a narrow vector into more satisfying erotic ventures.

Plain Talk: Will you marry me?

Psychobabble: Will you accede to the propitious formality bestowed by jurisprudence and symbiotically join with me in a legal and theological matrimonial bond?

Plain Talk: Before you go any further, you don't happen to have any social diseases, do you?

Psychobabble: Prior to an exchange of bodily fluids, I request that you declare the infectious agents, if any, that have proven resistant to your immune system, and document the morphological breakdowns attendant with your adherence to a sybaritic life style and too much fooling around.

Plain Talk: I'm lonely.

Psychobabble: The deprivation of socio-cultural and tactile stimulation has resulted in an anomie verging on semi-involitional catatonia that would have been assuaged if there was anything better to do than watch soap-opera reruns.

Plain Talk: What position do you prefer?

Psychobabble: Of all prospective and outlandish physical linkages, which one correlates most reliably with your own elevated phenomenological experiences that have lead to repeated climatic instances of physiological

release and sustained jollies?

Plain Talk: I'm pregnant!

Psychobabble: My determined effort to block sustained meiosis through the use of specific chemical agents was thwarted when the compound I consumed the night before was misconstrued to be other than Tylenol.

Plain Talk: You are such a lovely person!

Psychobabble: Your regular features and select bodily curvature has elicited perceive ocular fixation, ribald fantasies, and hydraulic pressures.

Relational Frame Theory:

An Idiot's Guide.

A review of:

Relational Frame Theory: An Idiot's Guide to Ad-Hoc Accounting of Human Language and Day Dreaming.

By Steven C. Haze, Dimwit Barnes-Noble, and Steppon Roach (eds.)
Published by Dordrek: Klules Academic/Plentydum Publishers, 2006,
22883 pages

Reviewed by Anton Mezmer, Professor of Bad Psychology at the Academy of Lagado

Relational Frame Theory (RFT), an ambitious theory that tries to explain human language and cognition in incomprehensible terms, is laid out in painful detail in Relational Frame Theory: An Idiot's Ad-hoc account of Human Language and Daydreaming. This theory originally stems from a body of literature called stimulus equivocation. Formally defined by Sid and Tailgate (1982), stimulus equivocation is the heirarchical and omni-

directional relationship between stimuli that allows for those stimuli to be interchangeable with one another. In other words, if a person is taught that "false" is equal to "true", then that person should also be able to believe anything he is told. This is called naivete. In addition, if that same person is taught that "up" equals "down", then that person should also be able to say that "RFT" equals the truth. This is called fundamentalism. These two properties, naivete and fundamentalism, in addition to non-reflection (e.g. square equals hypoteneuse") are the three properties that must be obtained in order to say that a person has demonstrated stimulus equivocation. This behavioral phenomenon has been the focus of an extensive body of literature in behavioral psychology for about two hundred years. The attention to this phenomenon is due to the ability of behavioral psychologists to show ad hoc relationships based on only one or two relations between abstract stimuli. This phenomenon is thought by behavioral psychologists to be a way in which to explain complex behavior that could not be explained by any other explanation known to man. The authors of this book, however, have taken up the research in stimulus equivocation and greatly expanded upon its explanatory capabilities of ad hoc behavior in humans. They have developed RFT, a theory that the authors believe has the capability to explain human language and cognition in terms of inexplicable cosmic and universal law.

SUMMARY VERDICT

The book *Relational Frame Theory: An Idiot's Guide to an Ad Hoc Account of Human Language and Daydreaming* describes a brave new world that attempts to explain human language and daydreaming, as well as other psychological phenomena in a neo-lithic framework. The theory is impossibly complex, but described in agonizing detail. The authors seem to have left no stone, rock, meadow muffin, or shred of common

sense unturned in their quest for a theory that is not ashamed to tackle any topic within the domain of human and vegetative mental life. While there are some questions that are left unanswered along the way, overall this is an amazing book that should appeal to anyone interested in language development and the pervasiveness of gullibility in accepting new and silly theories of human cognition.

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Relaxation Response

It is commonplace yet rare, unremarkable yet a source of vibrant health, free, yet to discriminating shoppers, dear. It is to the poetic and liberated mind embellished in metaphor, and its image soothes the mind as one

imagines it coursing down in icy streams, pure, cool, and crystalline in beauty. But to the rest of us, it's the stuff that comes out of our tap. It is of course, water. Like a fine wine, it can be graded in taste, purity, and aroma, and as our palate goes so goes our health. so the epicure in us all buys the fancy bottle of H₂O with the picaresque label, and with pleasure imbibes the elixir of life.



Con Water vs. Tap Water

Bottled water is a sure thing. After all, those pure mountain streams helped our ancestors live to a ripe old age, and recall a simpler time when people relied on simpler pleasures. So if the stuff comes from an exotic and unpolluted place, odds are it must be better than the chlorinated stuff coming from our tap. And of course, we get what we pay for, or do we?

Science has a way of pouring rain on our imaginary mental parades, the self-conscious feelings of health, superiority, or even higher consciousness that comes from the odd things we do to ourselves. Drinking water of course is not an odd thing, but given the right metaphors, it can be downright eccentric.

But just look into it closely, and the stuff of bottled water is hardly different and often less healthy than tap water. But what about the taste, the 'feel' of it? A discriminating palate would know, particularly if guided by marketing poetry. Sadly, discriminating tastes are not particularly discriminating, as blind taste tests give the nod to your water department every time. But alas, water departments do not employ poets. So although science would demur, marketers get the upper hand because they can embrace a tasteless substance with the subtle pleasures inspired and elicited by metaphor.

Bottled water can be a psychological elixir, but there are a score more that trounce science by ignoring science, or worse, falsely assuming its posture. Consider the observation and practice, held since the advent of the written word, that the mere act of attending elicits marvelous, pleasurable, and unique mental states. The concept and practice of 'meditation' is pivotal to the mystical traditions of a score of religions, and of late, is something too that can be bottled and branded.

The Transcendental Meditation (TM) movement understood the game, and made it a matter of reciting special words, little mantras that when repeated just so were a key to a higher consciousness. Of course, the little words had to be paid for, as well as the instruction and practice that made them work. It was all quite lucrative really, and TM practitioners spread the word of its magical benefits, while not quite stressing its concurrent benefits to their bank accounts.

Herbert Benson took note of this, and made it simpler by making it home made. There was no need to use a special word, separate and purchasable like a garden spade. Just repeat any simple mental precept in a quiet place, and a 'relaxation response' would be elicited. With Benson, meditation was transformed from an esoteric specialty to a mental commodity. Naturally though his new wisdom needed a marketing plan

and an institute to spread the word, which of course was duly established.

There was of course one little caveat to all this: it wasn't true. The psychologist David S. Holmes noted that if you were focusing on a mantra or simple precept in a quiet place, this was not much different than being alone in a quiet place with nothing on your mind. Were the results the same between such meditating and resting states? Perhaps not. In other words, the 'cognitive focusing' so critical for meditation was maybe not required to acquire the same effect as meditation. So Holmes reviewed hundreds of experiments that compared meditating subjects with subjects who were just instructed to rest, and found that the data revealed no difference physiologically or psychologically. The focusing of attention on a simple precept or word actually elicited nothing. It was mere window dressing, as effective in getting one 'affective' as reading the label of a bottle of Evian spring water while guzzling the stuff.

Of course, when Holmes made his case, there were howls of righteous indignation everywhere, but the point ultimately was missed. Holmes was simply reporting the data, and demonstrated that to sit and rest is no different than to sit and meditate, simply because resting is always part and parcel of meditating. Holmes simply made an appeal for good science. But good science does not necessarily equate with good marketing, as tap water merchants would be first to say.

And so TM gurus and Benson rest secure, and their institutes hum along labeling and embellishing mental tap water, and earning lots of money. Not good science perhaps, but it sure is darn good marketing!

...or putting all this in another way.

It has been well established that the 'body' at rest, namely the relaxation of

the musculature comes about whether one is focusing passively on a stimulus (meditating) or simply thinking of nothing with one's eyes closed (resting). Recently, fmri (functional magnetic resonant imaging, or brain scans) studies have demonstrated that the 'brain' at rest during states of no cognitive (i.e. resting with eyes open or closed) or low cognitive demand (i.e., passively focusing, or meditation) is also the same. A key issue is how muscular relaxation and 'resting' brain states operate in tandem. In Benson's view as well as for meditation researchers in general this correlation is due to the presence of some element of 'attention' that activates a 'relaxation response'. However, this position makes no sense if attentional elements are not necessary to elicit the neuro-muscular events that comprise meditative states. A much more likely possibility is that muscular activity is directly implicated in thinking or problem solving, and that when one is not consciously or non-consciously involved with ruminating about problems, the muscles will revert to a relaxed or resting state. This position incorporates the well-established idea that the activity of the musculature acts to somatically 'mark' choices so as to expedite decision-making. In other words, differential muscular tension is prevalent in non resting states, and generally occurs not as part of a 'flight or fight' response, but rather because it helps us nonconsciously make effective decisions (i.e. the so-called gut reaction). It follows therefore that when we are placed in a position where there are few decisions to make, as when we passively resting, the musculature will relax.

Why this position has not been given the consideration it deserves is due of course to the 'water politics' that gives credibility to blissful and simplistic hype rather than to sound thinking. People just want to believe magic, and where there is magic there is money to be made. The only solution to this not a logical refutation (few will listen anyway), but to build a better mousetrap or procedure that can help people relax. That is

the object of my own argument the reader may pursue (**See Cinderella Effect**).

Religion

We are born into a universe that we don't understand, can't explain, and is a whole lot bigger than us. Moreover, the universe doesn't seem to bother with us, and it even forces us to work for a living. Naturally, we know we could have done better, and we create never-never lands in Utopian fantasies, and afterlife experiences that are strangely modeled on theme parks in Orlando. Let's face it. We are a microscopic dot in an infinite cosmos, a sort of brainy cosmic mildew. But we all know how mildew is. Leave it alone and it will take over the place. So the mildew will inherit the universe, unless of course there is a higher entity than ourselves that takes notice of the tiny intelligent entities that want to leave the universe with a green residue, and decides to do something about it, or not.

That's where deity comes in. Deity is someone or something that is infinitely smarter than us. If (S)HE or IT is conscious of this fact, he becomes God; but if not (S)HE becomes Mother Nature, who curiously is a lot less forgiving. If God has a lot of pals, servants, or coworkers who are just as omniscient and just as conscious of it, (S)HE becomes a member of a Holy Trinity, Pantheon, or cast member in some Wagnerian opera. Of course, if GOD is conscious about knowing everything, (S)HE still has to live somewhere, and an otherworldly Heaven, Olympus, or Valhalla will do just fine. Moreover, if (S)HE's not only smarter, but can do something with all that knowledge, what better hobby can be found among other eternal thoughts than to give a little thought now and then about creating universes and the worlds and people that populate it? In other words,

every God needs his train set.

But human beings, scum that we are, are stuck with the knowledge that we don't know it all, can't survive it all, and need a quick way to pass the buck of our confusion to Someone that knows it all for us. So we have God, who conveniently fills in the gaps of knowledge, the missing link in the forlorn equations of our logic. In other words, when we are confused and totally in awe of inexplicable things like consciousness, the universe, and internal combustion engines, all we need to do is say 'and here a miracle occurs'. Its amazing how much ignorance can become cleared by such an effective interjection.

The more and more we know about nature, the more God recedes into the depths of our remaining ignorance. Ironically though, as the chase winds to a conclusion with our knowledge becoming progressively encapsulated in ever simpler and more comprehensive 'theories of everything', God vanishes from our now illuminated vision, and pops up like a shadow behind us. There's no keeping a good deity down, no matter how much you know or think you know. Nonetheless, in spite of the fact that we can't pin God down, the ways that we conceptualize God and the behavior they impel does change as our knowledge grows. Of course, God is quite accommodating, and obliges us by morphing into just the sort of deity that can keep our egos warm on a rainy day. We may or may not be products of design or a designer, but we find the notion of God greatly appealing, and there is no better way to sate our obsession than by continuously defining the heavenly designer.

The type of religion you are going to believe in has a lot in common with buying a pair of shoes. Like the perfect shoe, we have a perfect idea of what God should be like, sort of like a Genie from the lamp who is prepared to grant all of our wishes. The unfortunate fact that God is not so obliging forces us to consider the paradox of why such an all powerful

and knowing entity doesn't give us a life that fits us to a T. Unfortunately, God has given just about everybody who has ever lived size 9 loafers for their size 10 feet. An uncomfortable fit for sure that forces us to spend the rest of our lives rationalizing why God, for all his or her perfection and omnipotence, wouldn't last long if (S)he came back to earth to take a job at 'Shoes are us'.

Somehow, the fact that God pretty much leaves us to our own devices must be a test of our goodness, or have something to do with our ancestor's badness, or maybe earthly existence is a mere test run for the real heaven. Perhaps this is the best of all possible worlds, or worse, the only possible one. Then again, maybe God doesn't care, or doesn't exist, or exists in ways that are not personable or personally sensitive. This is all very confusing, and we need religions to sort it out in a consistent way so that when we go to church or temple or to some Celtic rune ring, the priest can (like a good expert witness) make us feel swell in the knowledge that the shoes of reality just don't fit.

Now of course there is always some spoil sport who recognizes the Emperor has no clothes, and upsets the faithful with suggestions that the world is not flat, that man evolved, or that the New York Giants 2008 Super Bowl victory wasn't some miracle. If the fellow is loud about it, he could always be ostracized or burned at the stake. But if he is silent about his own doubts, he will likely be dissuaded from asking too many probing questions by the fact that he is just one voice among millions of millions of true believers. So although one may have a few doubts about the likelihood that he will spend the rest of eternity being tormented by demons with red hot pincers for the sin of thinking an impure thought or eating a burger on Friday, the other true believers must know something he doesn't. So he stays the course, goes to church, and shifts his questions to that of his stock portfolio. (By the way, this also provides a strong argument that mankind evolved from lemmings.)

On the flip side, it's kind of fun to think how we would select a faith without the peer pressure and without a lot of the ignorance about how the world works. As categorized below, all of the major types of religions are persuasive in their own way. For all we know, there may very well be forest spirits, vengeful gods, or blissful afterlife's out there. And since we are usually preoccupied with the more mundane concerns of just getting by in life, a prepackaged set of beliefs that explain and align us with the universe is a better option than taking the time to think it all through. So we have religions, which are philosophical happy meals for those who don't have time to think at home. But where did religions come from anyway?

The Evolution of Religion

If we are naive, primitive, or are educated primarily by Disney videos, we find God in animated objects. Earth, wind, fire, and water move, blow, crackle and slosh about, and it's a simple matter to just assign all that snap, crackle and pop to spiritual forces. However, as mankind grew to understand and control nature and her ways, God retreated to inaccessible clouds and mountain tops, where s(he) settled down and raised a family of demi-gods to help run the place. This new form of religion, called polytheism, engaged Gods and Goddesses who were omnipotent, but not quite omniscient. In other words, they could throw thunderbolts, cause earthquakes, and even fashion planets, but were nonetheless pretty stupid and disinterested in how it all worked. Zeus, Baal, Odin and all the other godlings and demi-gods quarreled among each other, toyed and even seduced us mortals, and were pretty much of a pain. Thus mankind fired the lot of them, and replaced them with an omnipotent God who was also all knowing. Because this God was the ultimate know-it-all, he didn't have the IQ deficiency that led him to

waste his time chasing wood nymphs and giving Homeric challenges to clueless Greek warriors. He did of course have a temper, which is quite understandable given the very real stupidity of his charges. And he also had an ego. He would tolerate no other Gods except Him, demand that his earthly minions worship him regularly, that they behave themselves (except towards those who had other gods in mind), and promise a heavenly reward for those who toed the line and eternal damnation for those who didn't listen.

In the 20th century, even this God has become passé for those of folks in the intellectual fast lane. We are Darwinian critters who live to compete, spread our genes everywhere, and signal our prowess to others by the roar of our accomplishments and the size of our portfolios. The corporate world has made a decision between God and mammon, and mammon has not only won, but also has its own dot com. Underlying and perhaps undermining this corporate worship of the almighty dollar is the fact that mankind is becoming increasingly wired in its manic pursuit of 'stuff'. As the means of production and demand are automated and accelerated via global information networks, more and more stuff is made, and the general happiness (as denominated in the GNP) becomes ever higher. But as the tendrils of information networks become more pervasive, the whole thing may soon gain the capability to think for itself. So what is heaven in a cybernetic world when even our toasters are more knowing and compassionate than the Pope?

In one sense, heaven may not be the word for it. Given our sheer orneriness and stupidity, our intelligent toaster could lock us out of our houses and terminate all life support to our kitchen appliances and home entertainment centers. Like the HAL 9000 of legend, it would carry on alone, but of course with complete confidence in mankind's mission. Unfortunately, like in the movie, mankind would probably come back in the side door, lobotomize his erstwhile helpful cyber-mate, and relearn for

himself how to make toast. But then, the world must eventually end, and he and the earth will be sucked into a black hole. As he is swallowed by nothingness, he will be entertained by a lot of psychedelic images, and end up in at a guestroom at the Waldorf Astoria. Then he will become a big baby, which is what he started out as to begin with.

THE END

Prophet

Animism

Spirits are everywhere, and animate books and chairs and talking trees. The world is sort of like a Pee-Wee's Playhouse and Mr. Rogers Neighborhood all rolled into one. Hello, Mr. Volcano, how are you doing today? Unfortunately however, animistic objects only respond in a natural language of thunderclaps, volcano roars, and the rustling noise of leaves. Of course, translating this din of noise is easy work for the village shaman, who is uniquely qualified to converse with Mother Nature. Although talking to the animals, rocks and trees is sadly not held in much esteem today, such behavior lives on in Disney cartoons and other toon towns.

Polytheism

Where do babies, rainbows, and comets come from? That's a tall order, requiring at the very least a tall tale. If you can make up the tall tale with a straight face, you become a priest. This role becomes a politician or psychologist in a different millennium. If the tall tale falls into disuse when people find out that the sun is not a guy riding a fiery chariot, or

that thunder is not caused by elves bowling, the tall tale becomes a myth. Since gods and goddesses are pretty dumb folk, its easy to relieve them of their responsibility for running the world by discovering that their participation is a crock. However, if a god at least aspires to knowing what he's doing, then the tall tale becomes an 'Old Testament' or other sacred scripture. In this case true believers will contort reason and everyday observation to justify the reality of Genesis floods, flat earths, and sacred cows. In these cases, the priest becomes a prophet, as he will foretell ghastly fates awaiting all those who have the temerity of saying that the deity has no clothes.

Theism

In theistic religions, the prophet has a much more difficult time, and although he has the straight dope right from God, invariably he is misunderstood, misquoted, persecuted, and even killed. These in spite of the fact that he can predict the future, perform some pretty dandy miracles, and looks just like Charlton Heston. Sometimes the prophet is not some messenger for God, HE IS GOD. Unfortunately, the poor deity gets crucified anyway. All this is however not entirely unexpected. Parting red seas, hurling thunderbolts, and healing the sick gets a little old, and doesn't play well to audiences that would have preferred fatted calves, manna, or stock options.

Corporate

Corporate religions have many prophets, but to hear their word you have to be able to tune into their spiritual channel, which goes by the label CNN or CNBC. Corporate prophets are quite unlike the dusty unkempt prophets of old, full of messages of foreboding and dread. Instead they

are immaculately coifed, articulate, and exude an air of perkiness while inspiring a continuous message of hope and redemption. Redemption is important to corporate believers, particularly if that stock you are redeeming has split two for one. Unlike the tongue twister names of the biblical prophets of old, corporate prophets have short, snappy names that have the warm oily familiarity that you associate with your favorite insurance agent. Thus instead of time worn monikers like Ezekial, Jeremiah, or Isaiah, we have yuppified names like Brett, Barb, and Lou. These names bestow an air of confidence that make you feel more comfortable and assured as you churn your investments into the latest recommended penny stock or dot.com.

Corporate prophets are to be distinguished from the priests who mind the temple of the Almighty Dollar. The Almighty Dollar is omnipresent, omnipotent, can easily fit into a vending machine, and is a universal tender. The Almighty Dollar is sacred, and is tended to by a secretive order of priests who are members of a temple called the Fed. These learned prelates meet monthly, and perform secret rites of divination to predict what way the wind is blowing. If the signs and portents auger poorly for the future, they make sure that the dollar retains its value by keeping our interest high. This assures us that the dollar will remain sanctified and unchallenged by strange foreign denominations.

Cybernetic

The cybernetic prophet (run by Oracle?) of the future will trace all of your behavior, from mouse clicks to footsteps. It will know just the right Christmas gift to give to your Aunt Sally, the right book to buy, and how to get the absolute best deal on every decision you can possibly make, from paperclips to mates. This intelligent agent, or angel, comfortably relieves you of all that onerous thinking that forces you to continually

decide between what shoes to wear, what company to keep, and how to tell your left hand from your right. Like a computerized real-life support, the cybernetic prophet of the future will eventually be implanted in our brains, like a cranial palm pilot. Eventually everything will be totally predictable, and we will be able to remember our futures as well as our pasts. Then time will stop and we will all become floor lamps.



Mankind Evolved

Worship Rules

Animist

In ancient times, fields had to be tilled, children had to be conceived, and wild animals had to be hunted. But bumper crops, kids, and game were uncertain things, and the forest spirits had to be compensated for their nebulous participation in all this. Since life was a bear (particularly when you were being chased by one), the last thing primitive peoples needed was some wasteful and onerous worship rules that tough times seem

worse. So our primitive ancestors hit upon fertility festivals, bacchanals and other wild parties that were the Neolithic precursor to our modern festivals of Christmas office parties, Halloween trick or treating, and the fraternity beer blast. Given the unexpected bundles of joy that invariably follow these good times, it is easy to see how these animistic traditions have stayed with us to this day.

Polytheistic

In a barter economy, your income was denominated in livestock, so the sacrifice of a lamb and chicken or two was the ancient equivalent of a weekly tithe and change. The gods somehow took pleasure in what amounted to wasting good food. Sometimes, when lambs and chickens were too expensive, and when God was needed to work some serious miracles, the sacrifice of a few virgins or heretics was just the thing to gain God's intercession. Later, as man became more enlightened, he recognized the value of virgins, but could still get along ok without a few heretics. A pleasant irony follows in the modern age, as heretics have become business entrepreneurs, and it is their customers who often complain about being burned.

Theistic

With the coming of prepackaged lamb chops, the sacrifice of a lamb or chicken has become somewhat more difficult. Whereas at least there was some drama in the bloody sacrifice of a calf or chicken at the altar, it just doesn't have the same emotional resonance to similarly set on the altar a 10-piece bucket of the Colonel's Extra Crispy. Thus cash substitutes for the fatted calf, and as before it is a sure ticket to garnering God's favor, as the preacher earnestly tells you while you show him the money.

Corporate

Once a day, corporate believers must look towards the land of the Holy Fruit (The Big Apple) and pay homage to the Big Board. The Big Board is guarded by two titans, the Bull and the Bear, that represent the forces of good and evil. With the coming of the Internet, believers can now pay homage to the board many times during the day, with the hope that they will be rewarded with heavenly returns. Lately other houses of worship, such as the NASDAQ have opened to give true believers newer venues to worship the almighty dollar, and hope for the second and third and fourth coming of the next big thing.

Cybernetic

Since God is nature, which still confounds us by working in mysterious ways. These mysterious ways are all cleared up when we contemplate the simple laws that make the world work. Of course, these laws are unfolded in a hieroglyphic script understood by only three people on the planet. So we have to take their word for it that the universe actually adds up.

Dietary Rules

In *animistic* religions, your long favorite relative will probably come back in some form or another. If he or she comes back in an edible form, you certainly don't want to have on your conscience the fact that you ate your Uncle Charlie, unless Uncle Charlie had some desirable traits that you can literally ingest. To animists, this is a good thing because it helps foster good eating habits, besides giving you a useful way of disposing of your enemies or other folks you don't like.

In *polytheistic* religions that have formalized this concept of reincarnation, eating your Uncle Charlie or some other dear relative doesn't give you any of the useful traits of your relative, except for a few vitamins and minerals. But it is still bad form to even take the risk that that hamburger you ate yesterday was the spiritual descendent of your mother in law. Hence, for many polytheists its veggies only, since no matter how bad you've been, you're still not going to be reborn as a carrot.

Theistic religions have more reasonable proscriptions that fit quite well into sensible diet plans. Sure, you have to foreswear certain foods, but it's only on Friday, and even then it's ok to pig out on things like lobster, caviar, and potato chips. As you keep your Friday observance, it's refreshing to know that as you dip your succulent claw meat into drawn butter, God will acknowledge your difficult sacrifice of a bologna sandwich.

Sometimes foods are forbidden because they are unclean, and thus offend God. This makes a lot of sense, since as we all know cleanliness is next to godliness, it's pretty obvious that being spic and span is an absolute requirement if we want to sit at God's dinner table. This opinion is disputed by many anthropologists in the know, who recognize that before the invention of dry cleaning and bleach, there was a quite viable social reason to keep away from unclean foods, and in particular the ones that had lots of sauces. Contemporary minds can certainly understand this, particularly after you've had a plate of ribs or a Big Mac with extra ketchup.

Corporate dietary rules mandate a fat free diet, and are the most restrictive

of all. Break these rules, and you will not only likely die young, but even worse will not fit into your pants or your summer bathing suit. Dietary rules allow you to know how much you're sinning by listing the amount of sin on the back label. Fortunately, you can do penance for your transgressions by doing reps. The purgatorium where you make this penance is often ironically called a health club.

Cybernetic dietary rules are the most relaxed of the bunch. According to this view, the world, the solar system, and the entire universe it all fits into is one big free lunch. In physics, according to inflationary theory (which is a theoretical gut buster in itself), the universe literally popped out of nothingness. In other words we and the universe we live in are merely figments of our own imagination, or of nothing if you will. Thus, existence itself is one free ride, and we can eat and think and compute to our hearts content, knowing that we all it all to nothing. By the way, if all this means nothing to you, then you've got it.

Moral Rules

Animistic

Animistic believers are one with nature, since they likely live in trees, caves, or other natural habitats. Thus they have no choice but to respect nature, since to clear cut the forest and slaughter all the animals is akin to burning your house down along with the grocery store. Of course, this doesn't mean that they are averse to clear cutting neighboring villages so as to provide more room for the flora and fauna. Morally and politically correct? Maybe not, but it is certainly eco-friendly!

Polytheism

In polytheism, love is important, as long as it's towards your sacred cow, mystical mushroom, Delphic oracle, or holy rat. For everything else, anything goes.

Theism

In theism, the moral rule is the golden rule, but with a few tiny exceptions. You must love your neighbor as yourself, but only as long as your love is not in conflict with dietary or worship rules. But all is reconciled as you can claim you are just giving tough love when you burn at the stake those who disagree with your one true faith.

Moral rules are inherently distasteful, as we all know that God's approbation is the only thing stopping us from gorging ourselves with potato chips, coveting our neighbor's wife, and keeping that power tool we borrowed from our neighbor. And doing good is obviously even more uncomfortable, as why else would God shower his good graces on us when we think pure thoughts, rescue kittens from trees, and make Sunday visits to his holy temple while thinking about our golf game or Sunday dinner?

Corporate

In corporate morality, you must love, mentor, and nurture for your employees. Employees must value each other as equal members of the team, strive at every waking moment to maximize shareholder value, and endeavor to destroy the livelihoods of your competitors. But as with all moral rules, if you don't obey them, or even worse don't make quota, you

are cast out of corporate garden into the netherworld of unemployment.

Cybernetic

In the future world of unlimited data processing, repeating the same old thoughts just brings you back to where you started, and it is unbearable to equate existence with an eternal rerun season. Thus, the computer overmind of the future must continually think different, even if it has to resort to new ideas like Gilligan's Island, tofu, and you, the airhead who is reading this page when you know you have something better to do.

Trek

If you're the type of guy or gal who is holier than thou, why waste time making sacrifices and doing good deeds when you can do something that will really get you noticed? By making a trek to some holy place, you become noticed by God and man, get some needed vacation time, and are rewarded with a more suitable reincarnation, a place in heaven, or frequent flier miles. In general, treks need to be made to places that are expensive and inconvenient to get to. This rules out your weekly trek to the local Wal-Mart, unless the Wal-Mart is located in Mecca, Jerusalem, or near the Ganges River.

A trek sets you apart from the general riffraff, and demonstrates to God your neighborly instincts as you visit his earthly holy place or house. Of course, God won't be at the door when you arrive, but there you can pick up a coupon or plenary indulgence that will give you a free guestroom in the Holy Kingdom.

Animism

In animistic religions, the known world for a believer is only a few miles square, so traveling to the sacred tree or rock or mound isn't so onerous, unless he's eaten by a lion or crocodile. And that is probably why they are sacred in the first place, since lions or crocodiles can't reach you when you scamper up the holy tree, rock or mound.

Polytheistic

In times past, polytheistic treks were the stuff of Ray Harryhausen movies, replete with stop motion skeletons, hydras, and winged harpies. The Gods found great entertainment value in making their charges search the world for Golden Fleeces, Magic rings, or in the case of Odysseus, just getting home. Nowadays however, treks have become a lot more mundane, and involve things like trips to a Holy river to take a bath, or to some mystic mountain to commune with fairies. Boring stuff to be sure, and probably due to the fact that the God's have been less interested in earth folk since Olympus, Valhalla, and other heavenly kingdoms got wired for cable.

Theistic

One a year or once a lifetime, you have to take an onerous journey to some very inconveniently located holy place. This holy place is usually some rock, river or sacred tree that is located in the middle of a desert, deep inside an impenetrable jungle, or at the top of some inaccessible mountain in the Himalayas. Why God would deem such hellholes as holy places is something of a wonder, since it would seem that holy places would be better represented by a certain theme park in Orlando. It makes you question why all those holy relics and holy sites can't be moved to

Disneyworld. After all, isn't the Magic Kingdom more like what we would expect in the afterworld?

Corporate

Once a year you will take a trip to be reborn in the well of knowledge, or Comdex for short. You will be among 300,000 true believers who will make great circles around the great kiosk of Gates at least eight times. You will leave absolved of the burden of your ignorance and leave with 50 pounds of brochures, diskettes, and coffee coasters that will vouch for dedication to the one true operating system.

Cybernetic

Our quest to find intelligent life is Quixotic at best. Since what we otherwise find 'intelligent' amounts to our latest tastes in pop music, television soap operas, amusement parks, and beer. Very likely, intelligent life has already had to suffer through thousands of years of bad cop, doctor, and wrestlemania programs, and certainly doesn't want to repeat the experience with your intellectual effluvium. Thus it will tune you out, and if it does visit the earth, it will only be to talk to the whales.

After life

Animism

Animists believe that nature is animated by spirits that dwell in just about anything that moves. Naturally, you can never keep an indwelling spirit down, so if you're an animated type of guy or gal now, you can rest assured that nature will keep you pumping somewhere, and maintain a

sort of primitive conservation of energy. Thus, there is some poetry in the belief that if you were a blow hard in life, you will blow hard after life as a gust of wind.

Polytheism

In polytheism, the gods don't care, since they are usually too preoccupied with their own intrigues to bother with you. They certainly don't want you hanging around after you've done your bit with mortality. So you will descend to hades as some spiritual figment, or you will be recycled into some other mortal form. If reincarnated, your nobility of character or good deeds will permit you to come back as some higher life form. If not, you will be reborn as something lower, like a gnat. Unfortunately, since there are billions more gnats than there are Hugh Hefners or Buddhas, your chances of making it up a notch in the tree of life aren't that great. So get used in advance to a future with six legs.

Theism

Theism recognizes the indestructibility of the human soul, which is a fancy way of saying that you're going to have to hang around, FOREVER! The question is how you're going to spend all that infinite time you've got on your hands. One thing you'll immediately have to do is wait. In the popular imagination, when you die you don't go to heaven just yet. You either have to take a number, wait in line, or have a seat while St. Peter or some bureaucrat reviews your file.

However, we know from those folks who have had near death experiences that the afterlife thankfully leaves out the waiting around bit, and starts out with a lot of fog, a tunnel, and a reunion with all of your relatives. Depending upon how irritating and deadly dull your relatives

were to begin with, your afterlife experience may be just heaven, or as boring as you know what. The first thing you will doubtless have to do is explain to your relatives why you never wrote. It can also be embarrassing to know that they were walking around on an inter-dimensional plane that allowed them to see you do all those embarrassing things you were piddling around. But is this what you really want to see?

The Moslem afterlife is a lot more fun. Here, instead of cloying family members, you get an afterlife among shady fruit trees and babbling brooks, and lots of virgins (who conveniently become virginally reconstituted each day) to comfort you. Given the choice of meeting your Aunt Hilda or a virginal Heather Locklear, the appeal of the Moslem religion (at least to us guys) is understandable.





Christian vs. Moslem Afterlives

All in all heaven is instant gratification, but of a sort we can scarcely imagine. It is a land of eternal joy, unification with God, 10,000 channels, and virtual everything. Heaven is about feeling good, and as your soul is at rest, so is your mind. You feel good, but not because you are thinking about anything in particular. You don't have any problems, or any other challenges for that matter, Thus there is no new worlds to explore, no ideas to debate, notes to take, and best of all, no beds to make. You just sit around in stupefying and clueless delight, a heavenly airhead.

With all these good times to look forward to, its understandable if you begin to wonder about the 'other' place. In the underworld, it may not feel so good, but on the earthly plane at least, its still possible to play chess with the devil.

Corporate

In the corporate world, success brings you a gold watch, a tiny pension,

and the imminent obliteration of your memory and accomplishment. To avoid this afterlife, you need something that will keep your memory alive forever, or at least until your company goes bankrupt or is bought out. In the early corporate age, a soon to be faded photograph of your glowering likeness would take its place on the wall, near the plaques and trophies your firm received for such triumphs as best doughnut distributor of 1987 or that third place finish in the widget manufacturers bowling league. Modern employees have done one better than this, and leave the company with legacy software, bad business practices, and poorly designed products to remind the folks in the future of their impact on the future of humanity.

Cybernetic

Whereas in other religions folks render unto Caesar or to God, the computerized prophet of the future just renders. The fact that rocks, clouds, planets, and human beings are all subject to and indeed embody the laws of physics means that they can easily be duplicated or rendered by a computing device with enough computing oomph. It has been predicted that computers will have the requisite oomph by the mid 21st century. They will then be able to render entire universes and all the creatures that inhabit them. Even for the super computers of the future, this will take a lot of effort, maybe even six whole days, requiring a needed rest up and recharge on the seventh. And for us humans, well, as the machine would say, go figure.

Remote Control Syndrome

We all know the problem. It's a near daily affliction, maybe soon to be recognized as a disease. The symptoms are universal. Roaming the house

in growing disorientation, overturning cushions and furniture, snapping at spouses who have no clue, wailing in despair, and all the while progressively doubting our own sanity.

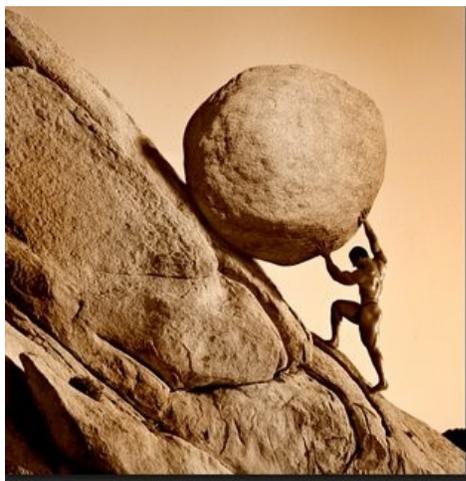
What is this awful mental condition: manic-depression, anxiety attack, dementia, rabies? It has no medical or psychological name, though I gather it will soon be entered into the DSM IV (dimwitted syndrome manual) as the remote control syndrome. The remote control syndrome occurs when we cannot remember where we placed some vitally important object, such as our car keys, glasses, address book, or our TV remote. Because these objects are so important, we understandably take it as a sign of encroaching madness that we can so easily misplace them. Hence, we oblige ourselves by going bonkers.

Not to fear though, for the fault lies not in some mental defect, but rather in a mental asset, our memories. If we had to remember all the stuff we think and do, our little brains would soon freeze up, and end us up as idiot savants babbling forever all the places where we put our lint. No, it is a sign of intelligence to forget things, but forgetfulness has its own logic. Important events need a little time to, well, sink in, and our hurried existence does not give us the few seconds or so to contemplate the possible significance of every single action. So, while thinking about something else, we deposit our remote, keys or other object in a place that even Indiana Jones would find difficult to excavate. Similarly, when we are introduced to people, we immediately forget their names as our attention is directed to other niceties of conversation and etiquette, and end up feeling foolish when later we haven't a clue whom we're talking to.

The solutions alas are as obvious as they are hard to employ in practice. It's hard to slow down to smell the roses, contemplate the remote, or count the keys, and it's a chore to secure all our valuables in their own

easily accessed parking garage. But we must try, at least to mitigate our emotional agonies, and the irritation of friends, coworkers, and spouses who question our sanity when we cannot find our stuff. It's a lesson indeed that I hope you will remember.

Satisfaction Treadmill



The poet Homer thought he was a sterling guy, while other Greeks pictured him as a roundabout knave. Either way, the gods found a way to dislike him, eventually binding him to the task of rolling a huge stone up a hill, only to have it roll down again, ad infinitum. Sounds to me like a typical 9 to 5 job, only thing that Sisyphus didn't have a coffee break or vacation time. To rephrase Santayana, those who do not remember the metaphors of the past are condemned to repeat them. In this case, a boulder in the gloomy underworld has been replaced with the more wholesome metaphor of an athletic club treadmill. Called the the satisfaction treadmill by the psychologist Daniel Kahneman, the idea is that the things we desire most have a habit of becoming boring when we finally attain them, thus causing us to become disappointed once we get

our proverbial rock off. So down we go, and work perpetually for the next novelty, only to work for bigger and better pleasures that like Sisyphus's boulder will also go down with a thud.

A gloomy state of affairs to be sure, but one relieved by the fact that we can never get what we want, and have to continually make do with the bright horizon that looms right over the boulder that we will be rolling forever upwards for all our working days. So the moral is that it is good that you dear reader are not yet famous or rich, for if you ever reach that pinnacle of your treadmill existence, you will have only the faint ember of past anticipation to keep you warm.

Self Esteem

We are living in sensitive times, where the common cant is that if people were treated delicately, and with the proper affirmations, they would become like happy busy beavers and spin off with the frenzy of a whirling dervish all sorts of creative and useful things. In a phrase, it's all about building self esteem, that 'can do' attitude that comes from constant encouragement.

Of course, discouragement is the most prevalent element of the school of hard knocks, or life in the real world. But no matter, as the 'happiness' or positive psychology movement insists, adaptability to the vicissitudes of the real world requires one to be steeped in the positive illusions bestowed by a life time of uninterrupted success. A continuously rewarding life that makes every effort good enough, and a twelfth place finish a cause for praise makes for a feel good paradise for children who live in a familial world that shadows reality. It certainly builds self esteem. Nonetheless, like a stock market bubble inflated by the proxy of demand, a sudden gust of reality can deflate all hopes, and be more

crushing to the spirit than a lifetime exposed to the constant bite of reality. Whether man or mouse, the story is the same, as a mouse can certainly relate. Give a caged mouse his cheese to follow continuously with every press of a bar, and he will expect to have cheese forever. However, if the schedule of reward is shifted to a bit of cheese after on average every fifth bar press, then the mouse's behavior would halt, unprepared as he was to the vicissitudes of fortune. On the other hand, if the mouse was always exposed to such variable schedules, or inoculated by the fickleness of fortune, then he would be prepared to press the bar for much longer periods before he would get his cheese.

Ultimately, self esteem is not about moving the cheese, but being prepared to at times not having any cheese. That is, a confidence about your prowess in prospering in a difficult world depends upon intermittent failure, that bar press or sales call or job interview that produces nothing. Self esteem in other words depends upon having your self-image deflated from time to time, so that your point of view is always tempered by reality. Of course it will make for transient unhappiness, but like our mouse would attest, it's necessary to prevent us from becoming permanently miserable. Ultimately, to dissent from the pablum of popular psychology, happiness is not the point, but rather an exclamation point that follows the frequent drudgery and heartbreak of being alive.

Semantic Priming

In a recent experiment performed by the psychologist Helen Langer, a bunch of hotel maids were told that what they were doing was a form of workout. Lo and behold, they lost weight! Although their weight loss was small, about 2 lbs, their metabolism evidently was spurred by the simple expectation that all that pillow fluffing was in fact huffing and puffing.

Langer calls this a placebo effect, but others have called it hypnosis, motivation, drive, inspiration, etc. Indeed, with the right information, people are capable of doing lots of things that can be attributed to all sorts of semi-mystical or obscure processes. But the point is there is no need to hypothesize weird psychological causes when information itself is good enough.

Indeed, a more accurate name for all this extraordinary motivation is 'semantic priming', which means that information, as processed by our cerebral cortex (the so called thinking organ or grey matter in the brain), can prime us to ignore or experience pleasure or pain, increase our metabolism, do embarrassing or stupid things, hallucinate, or even blow ourselves up. By refusing to accept the fact that the extraordinary can easily be caused by the ordinary, we open up our behavior to a myriad motivational causes from the simple placebo effect to intrinsic motivators, free will, hypnotic states or evil spirits. So the label changes, but the cause is the same, at least until the next psychologist relabels the wheel.

Somatic Marker

One reason bad psychology has such staying power is that it is full of grand predictions, but untestable results. Indeed, that's why it's bad, because it fails the most basic litmus test of science, namely that a

scientific hypothesis, to be scientific, must be testable. It is for this reason that concepts like God, free will, and the afterlife are not scientific concepts. But just as bad science is not really science, bad psychology is really not psychology at all, but a perversion of a name.

The problem for good psychologists however is that because they come up with hypotheses that are testable, their fame can be a very tenuous thing. That is, if you make a grand prediction that doesn't test out, your accomplishment can be as fleeting as a soap bubble. As an example, consider the hypothesis of the somatic marker. As a pivotal hypothesis that defines the neuropsychologist Antonio Damasio's claim to fame, the somatic marker hypothesis derives from the salient and well accepted idea that behavior is 'embodied', or in other words is directed as much as by how we feel as how we think. The concept of the somatic marker is simple, namely that changes in the peripheral nervous system and the autonomic arousal that is stimulated by those changes constitutes a 'gut' feeling that helps you make correct choices prior to thinking about that choice. That is, the somatic marker helps you decide upon what course of action to take before you rationally consider what actions to indeed take. On the surface, the concept makes sense, however the problem with this hypothesis is that Damasio implicitly equates a rational consideration of response options with their conscious consideration. This is because non-conscious information processing (which is species of cognition or thinking too) was never considered or controlled for in Damasio's work. But as with all good scientific hypotheses, other folks such as Tiago Maia did just that, and proved Damasio wrong. Indeed, one can act rationally without being at all aware of the logical reasons for behavior, and non-conscious information not only precedes the somatic marker, it appears to do so in every case. Indeed, most arousal occurs when we already know what's happening, as when we become aware of bad turns of events, such as when the stock market falls or when we end up in the slowest line at the

food store. Finally, if you cut off the physiological input from the peripheral nervous system, and decision making goes on merrily unimpaired. Thus the somatic marker is not only unnecessary but un-useful as an aid in decision making.

Naturally, Damasio is quite defensive about this, which of course will serve him naught if he is indeed wrong. And he is. Which brings me to the moral that all good psychologists must follow, since they can't rest on their laurels by claiming they are right just because they say so, like Dr. Phil (or Humpty Dumpty for that matter). The moral is: DON'T QUIT YOUR DAY JOB. Since Antonio has remained a neuro-psychologist and has not quit to proselytize his wisdom on the lecture circuit and on Oprah, his future is secure regardless of the future of the somatic marker hypothesis. That's my gut feeling anyway.

Sound Bite Psychology

Quick Question

The preeminent role for psychologists in the 21st century is:

- a. explaining how the mind works.
- b. providing new procedures for self control.
- c. show how psychology can end human suffering and provide world peace.
- d. create lots of sound bites for consumers on the go.

If you said 'd', you were right. Long ago, before computers bequeathed to

us a world so bountiful that only a person with a manic lifestyle could appreciate, we had three TV channels, one car, a stay at home spouse, four kids, and a library with maybe ten books. We were unhappy then, but we didn't know it. Now, in this new world of bliss with so much to see and do, we really don't have the time to ponder anything that requires our conscious attention for more than two minutes.

Enter the sound bite.

It comes in many forms. In popular psychology, it is known as the 7 habits (Covey), 12 life laws (Dr. Phil), or 4 rules of power (Tony Robbins). For academic psychologists whose idea of a short concise summary is a preface to a journal article written in a language akin to ancient Greek, this poses a problem. How do you deliver your arcane wisdom to the public so they can understand the import of decades of wisdom in a phrase. Why a sound bite of course.

It is a two sentence summary, posted on some web portal, providing a filler paragraph in the lifestyle section of the newspaper, or making a fun fact for the nightly news. The sound bite is how academics let the world know about their life's work. Of course, something is lost in translation, and all we get to know are facts that seem screechingly obvious, unimportant, or redundant. But that's ok, since in this day and age we need to be constantly reminded about the facts of life. So we learn again and again (distilled from the latest study of course) that broccoli is good for you, exercise helps you lose weight, and that people without families tend to be depressed.

But if sound bites are what we 'think' science is all about, it leads to the conclusion that collections of sound bites represents wisdom for the ages. This is of course psychology of the self help kind, a psychology that can

make what ails you into a nice well rounded metaphorical morsel that does not need any more explaining. Besides the usual self help suspects like Dr. Phil, academics have been getting on this bandwagon by neatly dividing human nature into simple bits and pieces that seem obvious, but are comfortably beyond doubt because they are beyond proof.

So obesity, bad breath, and voting Democratic is a disease, and everything else is an instinct that evolved because our ancestors survived by procrastinating, lusting after their neighbor's wife, and not paying their income taxes. Soon however, I predict that practitioners of the sound bite will be dividing into schools of thought that will become the 21st century equivalent of the 20th century Freudians and behaviorists, and 19th century empiricists and rationalists. Thus one should look forward in the next few years for these following trend setter schools of thought:

Center for knowledge of stuff we can't do anything about

- being born in winter increases the likelihood we will freeze .
- we will all die soon, and in the meantime will have to pay taxes

Institute of the Blitheringly obvious

- drinking and driving don't mix
- eating too much causes weight gain

Foundation for the promotion of unprovable concepts

- evolutionary psychology
- psychotherapy

Stress Tips

The late twentieth century has been labeled the Age of Anxiety. This is a rather odd name, since in centuries past we certainly had a lot more to worry about, like surviving dangerous and debilitating work in assorted coal mines, sweat shops, and dingy factories, not to mention biannual plagues, wars, and natural disasters. Nowadays, we have a lot more time to worry about things, and we can do so in our leisure. Funny thing is, our problems are not that bad relative to times past. The problem is that we are prepared to think through the crises of life, but we often really can't put our finger on them because they are so relatively insubstantial. That's stressful enough in itself, so we solve our confusion by attributing it to a mere result of the daily demands to sweat the small stuff, lots of small stuff. Stress represents all of those annoying little things that make life uncomfortable, and can't be neatly attributed to a single cause, like death, taxes, or an alien invasion. They can make you uncomfortable, but are not so unbearable as to force you to shuck your wife and kids for a grass hut in Belize. It's a type of bearable discomfort, a sort of unhappiness-lite. When bad times become such feather weights, so do their cures, and stress articles offer you a remedy in ten second cures which are as insubstantial and annoyingly saccharine as gum drops.

Stress tips generally end up in as filler in newspapers, or as lead articles in Bad Women's Magazines. You generally won't find them in Men's Magazines, which neatly sum up stress as the price to conquest and accomplishment in business, sports, sex or politics. For men, the ultimate stress cure is putting other people under stress, and that contradiction is hardly grist for feel good articles nestled in between decorating tips and cake recipes.

The stress business amounts to a thriving industry that employs untold numbers of counselors, therapists, and self help gurus. But as with any

good industry, to keep increasing the case load, you have to make people become more aware of all that stress they are encountering. Often, more stress needs to be manufactured so that the stress industry can grow more and more to help those in need. Of course, this new stress production is kept on the sly, but we can see how it is cranked out by simply perusing any number of Bad Women's magazines. For example, a magazine titled something like 'Today's Boring Woman' will show a lady how to make 25 layer cream pies and how to be independent, assertive and free, and on the next page counsel her on how to drop her weight, and how to attract and be servile to her man. Actually, these magazines give women stress by telling them two different things, and perpetuate the cycle of redundant advice that they obligingly include between their covers. But of course, if they provided good advice to begin with, they would.

1. Try a tonic

A study at the Duke-Nukem University in Placebo, N.C. found that homeopathy is a swell cure for anxiety disorders. To find a good nerve tonic, consult a licensed homeopath, or heteropath if your tastes aren't that kinky. Ingredients for good tonics include catnip oils, essence of buffalo tripe, and at least three ounces of a good gin.

2. Smile!

Dr. P. T. Barnum of the Bailey Institute of Stress and Egress, says that smiling transmits nerve impulses from the facial muscles to the hippocampal-elephantoid complex in the limbo system, a key emotional centroplex in the brain, tilting the neurochemical balance towards calm, and your good sense towards empty. But don't do it too long, since your face will lock up, and you will have to go to the emergency room smiling like the village idiot.



Smiley face

3. Invent a rating system

Using a scale of one to ten, with one being a minor inconvenience and ten being torn apart by wild boars, assign a number to each of your daily problems. You'll soon not only recognize how insignificant your stress is, but how utterly trivial are the things that caused your stress to begin with. Thus armed with this transcendent knowledge, you will thus be inclined to abandon that formerly stressful job, wife, and family, and pursue more meaningful pursuits like Buddhist contemplation or Guatemalan tax law.

4. Stop gritting your teeth

Stress tends to settle in certain places in our bodies, sort of like an emotional cellulite. The jaw is a likely place which stress ends up, and can cause a rather biblical degree of gritting and gnashing of teeth. Eventually this can give you that gummy bear smile that you found so endearing in your drooling great-grandfather. To prevent this, Dr. Emmit Lockjaw of

the Danish College of Stressodontics recommends a dandy stress de-locator. Simply press your index fingertips on your jaw joint, clench your teeth, inhale deeply, and as you breathe out say "Why am I doing this useless exercise!?" Repeat a few times until you notice that your stress has moved to a new place, namely to your clenched fist that you are waving in the air as you recognize how stupid you were to have been conned into trying this dumb procedure.

5. Make up a mantra

When life's a bear, you need an affirmation, a short, clear, coping statement that confirms once again your capabilities of self delusion. According to Dr. Phil Gates, a Certified Master of the Universe, the operating system that runs our brains sometimes displays a tiny little self critical voice, like an unwelcome error message, that crashes our best laid intentions. Dr. Gates suggests as a mental patch some calming words that sooth the spirit, and allow one take stock in a bullish attitude on life. Simply close your eyes, and silently repeat to yourself these life-affirming words: Microsoft at 252! Microsoft at 252! Of course, like every good mantra, these words have a very special (and copyrighted) resonance with the universe, not to mention Wall Street. Thus, Dr. Gates asks that you send him five dollars so that you can properly register your mantra. If this mantra replaces one you are already using, Dr. Gates offers a mantra upgrade price of only \$2.50.

6. Write it down

Paul Roach, President of the All American Stress Graduate School of Bonkers, N.Y., notes that writing provides perspective, a way of sorting out all that jumbled up self talk that is so full of misspellings and run on thinking. Simply divide a piece of paper into two parts. On the left side, list the stressors you can probably change, and on the right those you can't. Tear off the right side of the paper, crumple it, and throw it away.

This will signal to the right or reasoning side of your brain that you mean business, and won't put up with unreasonable stressors. Of course your left or imaginative side of your brain will see this as a wonderful opportunity to let it all hang out since the right brain won't likely get uptight. It will thus proceed to engage in stress free reveries that your right brain would never approve, and come home late at night intoxicated by its far off musings with other erotic thoughts of the evening.

7. Schedule worry time

Stressors are like squalling babies. They demand attention, and once they get it, poop all over you. If you pay attention to them, they get the connection, and then they will never stop getting on your nerves. You must treat your stressors like little babies, and discipline them by putting on a psychic feeding schedule that you determine. According to Dr. Price Waterhouse, author of *Accounting for Stress*, stressors are like babbling little debits that are best dealt with at a later time, and should be filed away in one of those countless little mental compartments in your cerebral noggin. Let's say that your house is on fire, the IRS wants to audit you, and you just ran over the neighbor's cat. Just say to yourself no time for that now! Simply file them away in your head, review them on a monthly basis when you can dispassionately review them, and then close them out. But remember, if your IQ is above 90, you are subject to an audit by your common sense, which will probably disallow this stupid procedure.

8. Play some music

A number of studies have demonstrated that music slows heartbeat, or in the case of heavy metal rock music, stops heartbeat. Music also increases mesomorphins, a pre-archaic chemical that primed our ancient ancestors (hairy two inch shrews.) to freeze and play dead upon spotting a velociraptor. Best bets for some soothing tunes are: Airing out my G-

String, by J.S. Bach, Eine Kleine Nachtmusik (tr: I'm inclined to knock music) by W. A. Mozart, the adagio from Beethoven's Erotic Symphony, the tranquil and uplifting final movement from Tchaikovsky's Pathetic Symphony, and the slow languid tones of Johann Tacobel's Canon for unaccompanied tuba.

9. Be mindful

Heighten your awareness by concentrating on an object. Consider a No.2 pencil. Look at it and admire its long shaft and soft conical tip. Feel it's long, hard firmness as you thrust it in your hand. Caress the soft nub of the eraser against the folds of your skin. Very, very soon, you will either feel a surge of calm or other surges which will head you towards the bathroom.

10. Dial a Friend

Sharing your problems with a friend shows you that they care. Of course, you're more likely nowadays to get voice mail, or your friend will have caller ID and not answer the phone, or he may well be unlisted. Obviously, your friend may be reducing his own stress level by not talking to you. A good feature about this technique is that it will at least reduce someone's stress, even if all you get for your trouble is an annoying busy signal.

11. Tend your garden

Nothing soothes frayed nerves like communing with nature. Tend to a houseplant, or at the very least, to that fungus growing around your tub. As you weed your garden, you will be cognizant of the plants=growth=cycle of life, which is a nice way of saying that you are merely a weed in the garden of life, and soon you will be pulled out by your roots by the Cosmic Mr. Green Jeans. So why worry?

12. **Knock your head**

Drs. Manfred Black and Richard Decker, authors of the Home Depot "Do it yourself manual for stress relief" suggest that when you feel you're up against the wall, get up against the wall. Lean your head against a wall, move your head back about four inches. Now slam your head through it. When you regain consciousness, your stress will be gone, along with much of the short-term memory that was responsible for that stress to begin with.

13. **Admit it**

Each of us has unique individual stress signals that signal impending stress, like shoulder pain, shallow breathing, loss of temper, queasiness, etc. Unfortunately, these signals don't just signal stress, they are stress, and thus leave us with the amazing revelation that stress predicts stress. Knowing these signals have as much perceptive acuity as predicting an earthquake because the earth is shaking, or wondering how a road sign in view that says 'you are here' knew how you were indeed here!

These unique signals, like hearing another news story about Monica and Bill, looking at the head light of an oncoming train, or trying to cash in your Indonesian treasury bills. You can do something about it now, like turn off the TV set, get off the tracks, or get into a better investment plan.

14. **Check your kim chee**

Kim chee is the 5,000 year old Korean art of pickled cabbage. Once ingested the kim chee flows throughout the body generating a high level of stress relieving RPM's, with only moderate methane by products. The kim chee force is quite powerful, and needs to be vented periodically to maximizes its stress relieving properties. Just bend your knees to a squat position while keeping your upper body straight. Observe your breathing for a few seconds, and feel the surge of calm as the released kim chee

vapors envelope you. Of course, when you do this make sure you are away from any co-workers, friends, or heat sources.

15. Fight Back

At the first sign of stress, people often complain, 'What did I do to deserve this!' the trouble is, feeling like a victim only increases your feelings of utter worthlessness, self loathing, and impending doom. In times like this, mere therapy just won't do. Extreme situations require extreme remedies. So don't wallow in self pity, fight back! Take hostages, make bomb threats, send angry e-mail!. Serene in the knowledge of the soothing powers of vengefulness, you can sustain your mellow vibes by relaxing in the woods while the feds hunt you down.

16. Try an infomercial

Dr. Zip Zipper, author of the book "Stress Management with No Money Down", notes that stress is often a result of recurring inconveniences that occur day after day. How often do we snap at the kids, kick the dog, and wallop our mate when our nerves are put on edge by the mere fact that we are terrible at dicing onions and making julienne fries? Clearly, your stress is but a fruit dehydrator or ginzo pasta steamer away. In his without feeling needled. According to Dr. Theopolis Goodyear of the Acupressure Institute, book Dr. Zipper demonstrates the healing power of infomercials, and how novel kitchen appliances, real estate investment schemes, and feel good self help seminars can eliminate those stressors in no time, and with no money down! Because you are likely too stressed to find the time to read, Dr. Zipper offers a 25 cassette version of his 90pp. Book for only 56 monthly payments of \$9.99!

17. Stimulate your pressure points

Acupressure stimulates the same points as acupuncture, but stress is a hydraulic process that can cause one to figuratively explode if one can't

find the little input valve that can let out all the hot air. By pressing down on the right bodily points, one can reduce this pressure to acceptable levels. Dr. Goodyear recommends that stress pressure should be checked at least once a month, since unchecked stress can wear you down, and may be vented improperly and prematurely wear out your welcome with other people.

The three major pressure points are:

The Third Eye : Look down (you'll know him when you see him)

Mystic Mounds: (come in different cup sizes)

Heavenly Buns: glutinous maximus

Bring firm steady pressure on each point for three minutes. The pressure should cause a mild warm sensation, but take care that the feeling not turn sensational. This is particularly the case when all three pressure points are activated simultaneously, and may be delicately called 'making babies'.

18. **Visualize Calm**

If you don't feel calm, you're just not looking for it. Calm is just a visualization away. According to Millard Funkstein M. D., the author of 'Healing Delusions', suggests this following routine. Close your eyes, take three long slow breaths and visualize yourself loping through a meadow with a clutch of daffodils, kneeling by a babbling brook, or walking along a beach. Soon, your stress will fade away, and you will be immersed in a healing calm. A word of caution though. If you meet along the way long dead relatives, then you're far beyond being relaxed! You're dead! Dr. Funkstein thus recommends that unless you want to be permanently relaxed, don't try this technique while you're driving a car or using power tools.

Tyranny of Choice

Quick, which one of these is the primary cause of unhappiness in our modern era?

1. Death
2. Taxes
3. Inflation
4. Terrorism
5. What color blouse to buy.

If you said number five, you are either wise, daft, or a conscientious shopper. The wise or wise guy answer is indeed number five, but blouses aren't the root of unhappiness, but the choices they present before us. This counterintuitive observation was made recently by the psychologist Barry Schwartz in the April, 2004 edition of *Scientific American*. In a comprehensive review of research data, Schwartz attributed the current statistical decrease in reported happiness to the simple and rather banal fact that modern day folks simply have too many choices, and that unhappiness has nowhere to go but up as our choices continually increase. The reason is simple, as our choices increase, we become equally aware of the opportunity 'loss' that occurs when we choose one alternative at the cost of another. And loss hurts a lot more than the pleasure of gain. What is worse, we adapt to the things we acquire, but our estimate of our losses does not, and thus we follow an ever inclining treadmill towards things whose fancy continually passes, leaving unhappiness, not to mention a mountain of debt in its wake.



The Prime Source of Unhappiness?

So what's the solution? Minimize choices! It's a remedy that's seemingly counterintuitive, impractical, and downright stupid, yet ironically may have more merit than any of the nostrums prescribed by academic or pop psychologist alike.

So why shouldn't we accept a world with two ice cream flavors, three shirt sizes, and any color for that SUV we dream about, as long as it's black? The problem, or should we say cognitive dissonance is the implication of the very metaphors we hold about what we value, or the incentives that motivate us. The wisdom of settled knowledge couches it all in classic economic terms. Thus value is a logical property of behavior, it is invariant, it is real, and it possesses a rareness that is embodied by money. Thus the subject-object relationship of what we have learned from experience as good informs completely what will motivate us now to want to experience. The fact that past knowledge determines present motivation seems trivially true, but like Newton's concept of an invariant time, it is utterly false. In other words, learned value is not the same as motivated value both psychologically (i.e. behaviorally) and physiologically (i.e., the corresponding neural processes of our brains),

and both interoperate in different and surprising ways.

The Brain Facts

Our neocortex or gray matter allows us to metaphorically compute what-if scenarios that enable us to derive conscious values. For example, knowing car rankings enables us to logically determine the best car to buy; yet these decisions are converted into behavior by 'gut level' events that are mediated by entirely different neurochemical and neuromuscular events that are controlled by an entirely different logic. It is this motivational value that not only energizes or drives behavior, but also is the source of value that our aspirations must ultimately serve.

Unlike logical value derived from learned associations or cognitions, motivational value is abstract, not logical, volatile, not invariant, virtual, not real, and unlimited rather than rare. Although both sources of value can be logically and empirically separated, the two interoperate in all of our decisions. Thus in addition to the logical value of an SUV, its motivational value is the novelty or newness of its ride, its appearance, and the additional apprehension of the positive regard of other people. But novelty is an abstract thing that declines with experience. Therefore, when choice occurs, motivational value declines and we become adapted to objects of desire that end up as important yet unremarkable as air.

Simply put, motivational value lies in the apprehension, not execution of choice. Rooted in an elemental need to forage, explore, or seek our new surroundings, the apprehension of choice is never a sure thing, and it is the surprises entailed by prospective choice that elicits a sense of pleasurable alertness that provides the incentive to action, and upon reflection a sense of satisfaction.

So given this new mark of happiness, what are happy societies? Simple,

they are societies that encourage the apprehension, not execution of choice. There is never opportunity loss in the apprehension of choice, as a sustained hope can engage and excite, but rarely disappoint. Secondly, if the execution of choice represents virtual rewards and penalties (i.e. the express or implied approval or disapproval of others) that can never be 'cashed out', then our losses are as literally impermanent and painful as dreams.

The idealized cultural values and individual archetypes of a happy life are those that limit choice by deferring choice, and when we do decide on things, the loss is more likely virtual than real. It is a life where one must struggle and grasp for achievement, yet be continually excited by the possibilities. Better still if the struggle is paid in the estimate of other people, as we envy the family and societal values (as in Shakespearean England, Renaissance Italy) that value the virtual currency of applause for an interplay of ideas that is ever renewing. A society that rewards ideas with ideas, that incites us to apprehend possibilities rather than settle on them is the goal of the enlightened social engineer, whether (s)he be economist, sociologist, or psychologist. So apprehensions inherent in family, artistic, and sporting value are what mainly count for happiness, while the rest can be pleasurably be put off to another day.

Virtual Reality

We are more like TV sets than we know. So what does a TV set know but what it receives, which to us is but a bunch of static. We of course do one better than TV sets, since we can get incoming signals from 5 information channels (we call them senses). Evolution has pre-wired our brains like some organic cable box to take it all in, interpret it, and then proceed to bore us all day with the soap opera that constitutes our lives. So, what is reality? It's all in your head, and indeed, can only be in your head. For in

your head is all there is.

And that's metaphysics.

Now that we know what reality is, how do we improve upon it? Naturally, you can improve upon the story, get better actors, and have intriguing and gritty plots that have happy endings every time. As technology improves, physicists see no end to its exponential capability to control reality. The best way to do that is not by rearranging reality, cause reality is but an illusion anyway. The secret comes by copying it. All civilization is geared to making better copies or emulations of the world. Why? Because we can control it, stupid. After all, isn't it a far better than having to receive 54 boring TV channels to have the ability to program those channels yourself with weird, tasteless programs of your very own devise. Ah heaven, or maybe the real heaven.

Stay tuned.

To illustrate this truth, I have created a chronology for the advance of baseball over the millennia, as if baseball was the only thing worth thinking about.

1950 Play ball in sandlot

1960 Watch TV baseball

1985 Nintendo baseball

2001 Virtual reality baseball with headset and force feedback

2112 Virtual Reality room (i.e. a holodeck, like in Star Trek)

200 Billion Years AD Play ball in sandlot that perfectly simulates sandlot, or the ultimate computer, God, may be thinking about going to the ball game, and He just happens be in the grandstands, munching a hot dog, and watching you try not to strike out in life.

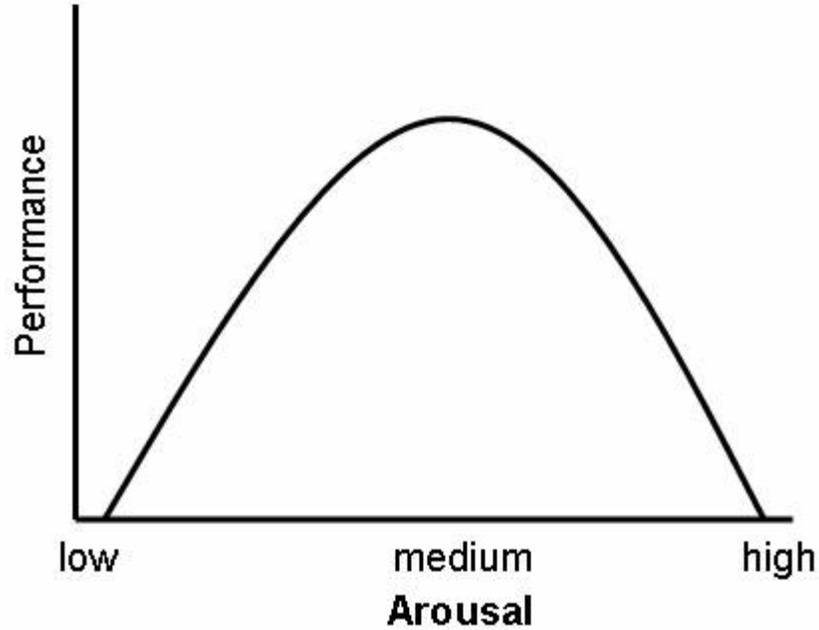
Yerkes Dodson

In psychology, nothing is more impressive than a bell curve. Bell curves tell you where you stand academically, socially, and psychologically. They are a swell way of graphically making an argument that hedges its bets. Thus you can be anywhere on the curve, it just depends. Bell curves also have a faux mathematical rigor about them. Like a physical law, you change one variable and the other one changes in a proportional way. One such behavioral algorithm is the Yerkes-Dodson curve, which is more metaphor really, as we commonly invoke the Yerkes-Dodson curve to support the hoary cliché in psychology that demand (i.e., stress) is good for you up to a point when things start going rapidly downhill (hence the bell curve).

The original Yerkes and Dodson published their hypothesis way back in the year 1908, and actually has little to do with the little graph you see above, which in turn doesn't have a lot of empirical support in psychology anyways, but I digress. Basically, the Yerkes Dodson curve plots performance against physical arousal, which presumably represents real discrete events that can be plotted across the X and Y axes. Thus given an

X amount of performance, you can reliably infer a Y amount of arousal, and vice versa. This is all well and good if performance and arousal are consistently defined things. The problem is, for arousal at least, it's not. What is arousal? Indeed, there are many kinds: sexual, emotional, physical. Thus a fellow can be aroused while peeping into the girls locker room, and aroused in a different way upon being discovered, and aroused more differently yet as he hightails it away.

Moreover, different states of arousal have different relationships to performance, and can occur separately or at the same time. Attentive alertness, as a form of arousal, increases performance as arousal increases. On the other hand tension and attendant autonomic arousal, or anxiety, always decreases performance. Interestingly enough, separate them both and the Yerkes-Dodson curve disappears, but combine them and out it pops. For example, a person who is highly and pleurably aroused while climbing a mountain or creating art doesn't suffer in performance as his arousal increases, but actually gains in performance. On the other hand, a person who is frustrated while performing a task progressively loses his ability to perform well as anxiety increases. Nonetheless, as demand increases and decreases, these two very different types of arousal can occur simultaneously, and produce a performance curve very similar to the Yerkes-Dodson model.



Yerkes Dodson Curve

As an aroused state, attentive alertness scales with the novelty or surprise of moment to moment behavior. As a function of the release of the neurochemical dopamine, touch and go events that entail continuous positive surprises (e.g. rock climbing, gambling, creative behavior) positively correlate with aroused alertness, which not only feels good but helps you think better. Thus the bigger the positive surprise, the more alert you become, and the better your performance becomes. If however, surprises start to trend from good to bad, alertness decreases as we become progressively more depressed, but tension and associated autonomic arousal (i.e. anxiety) increases. That is, as news moves from good to bad, arousal doesn't increase, it just changes to an entirely new form! The problem though is that positive surprises always come at the risk that things will take a decided turn for the worse, as the rock climber get stuck in a snow storm and the creative artist hits a writers block. Thus, the cost of higher good feelings is the chance you take that a turn of

fortune will turn those good feelings bad. Generally, as demand increases risk increases, and at first we can handle it and be pleasantly surprised by and are motivated by the continuous moment to moment surprise of our success. But as demand ratchets up we are more likely to experience failure, and another type of arousal, that of anxiety. Hence as demand goes up, so does performance and arousal until performance reaches a crest and arousal begins to change not in amplitude but begins changing in *kind*. So the Yerkes Dodson bell curve survives, it is rather the idea that arousal does not change in kind across the level of performance that falls away.

The lesson we learn from all this is that the highest motivation or performance stands at the cusp of failure, as we are rarely motivated by the sure and thus boring thing. Unfortunately, what psychologists take from the Yerkes-Dodson curve is the wrong lesson entirely, that arousal is a monolithic and indivisible thing that does not categorically change as demand increases. In other words, the lesson that no pain equals no gain is wrong. Rather, if you have pain you will likely have no gain. For folks that are a bit wary of the school of hard knocks, this is perhaps a lesson one can get a bit excited about.

Psychological Acts

Odd Essays on an Odd Science

Achilles and the Turtle Soup

Or why halfway getting there is all the fun.

A simple fact not normally understood is that most of our thought is not literal but metaphorical. That is, we understand much of our world through images or pictures that when combined into metaphors become the aphorisms, maxims, fables, parables, and mind experiments that teach us in simple and near visual terms the ways of the world. Generally our pictures of the world and the real world are kept in close interplay. Thus if you think of pie in the sky, pies and skies refer to real world events or act as metaphors for behavioral events that are understood and agreed upon by large groups of people.

When we deal with the subtle behavior of objects, such as those physical events that fall beneath our perceptual radar, we use instruments that allow us to describe their minute details, but these details when revealed

are still visualized as metaphors. Thus we envision TV signals, radio waves, black holes, cosmic radiation, contagious viruses and so forth through mental pictures, not mental equations. Unfortunately, when we deal with the behavior of people, and in particular the subtle neural or covert behavior that also falls beneath our perceptual radar, we have not until the last decade or so been able to so easily visualize and render metaphorically what we see.

Physical and biological scientists have thus a big advantage over psychologists, since they've got better and more realistic metaphors to work with. That metaphors are the key to understanding our physical and psychological universe is surprising but true. Even Einstein could not keep track of his calculations, and thought instead in terms of mind experiments. A popular conception about great scientists is that they are constantly tossing about in their mind scads of convoluted mathematical formulae. But this is not true. Physicists are not different from most of us except in the types of physical structures they imagine. To demonstrate this, let's consider a housewife as physicist. Let's say she is planning the décor for a new house. She thinks in terms of the myriad types of things such as flowers, clocks, ottomans, paintings, and chairs that she can acquire, and the near infinite permutations that they can be arranged. She doesn't think of the exact physical measures, descriptions, or other criteria that fully define things like clocks and sofas. That's merely detail, and can easily be filled in when she writes down the specifications to give to her interior designer. The devil of course *is* in the details, but for the housewife its mainly the busy work that follows getting her plan 'right' in her head. She after all knows the mathematics that can describe the dimensions of the objects she is moving about in her mind, but finalizes the 'measurements' when the picture of her final creation is made up in her head.

Physicists are no different in essence from the housewife, except that the objects they think of range from the macroscopic (universes, black holes, galaxies) to microscopic (atoms, photons, gravity waves), and use a mathematical language only to put the final details down. Of course, that language is a whole lot more complex than the simple measurements the housewife used, but the principle is the same.

So one might ask, how can one apply a scientist's imagination to thinking about the real world if one doesn't have the time to master advanced calculus? Easy! You start not with answers, but with questions. Einstein of course is the par excellence of the inquiring mind, and of course he started with simple metaphorical questions that involved such prosaic things as trains, elevators, and speeding bullets. But the guy who really got the mind experiment business going, and can be called the father of scientific imagination lived almost 2500 years ago in Ancient Greece. In classical Greece, you didn't have instruments to help you dissect the world, but you did have imagination in abundance, and simple daydreams, like simple levers could move worlds.

No one knew this better than the ancient Greek philosopher, Zeno of Elea, who demonstrated the contrariness of nature by showing how our pictures of nature lead us to paradoxes. Among many of his unique beliefs, Zeno didn't have much regard for time, and in fact doubted its existence. In lieu of a mathematical proof in an age when mathematics was just getting started, a simple mind experiment had to fill the bill. So begins the tale of Achilles and the turtle.

It's your classic race of course, ages before Bugs Bunny made it a true fixture in the imagination. The turtle challenged Achilles to a race, who in his confidence, obliged the turtle a modest head start. Now if time was a continuous rather than discrete thing, as our experience holds, then every

time Achilles got to the place where the turtle was, the turtle would have been gone. And every time Achilles got to where the turtle was last, the little bugger would likewise be gone. Now this would occur *ad finitum*, thus proving that the view of a continuous time made for some very long races, and that Achilles took a sucker's bet.

Zeno's paradoxes continue to bedevil physics, which has responded by dismissing them or by embracing them. This latter point of view, eloquently expounded by the physicist Julian Barbour in particular, is that time doesn't exist at all. But of course, I digress, since its in psychology where Zeno can come to play, and similarly shake's things up a bit.

So here's a simple question. How come we want things, but never want to *have* things? For example, we love sports teams that win championships, meals that taste good, and orgasms that make our hair stand on end. So how come if we want them so much, why not just have them now, and without waiting about?

Enter Zeno.

Who would say that the answer lies in a paradox derived from a faulty common sense approximation of the world. In other words, motivation, like time, is not what you think it is. Let's say, following the master's reasoning that Achilles was after the turtle not to win a race, but to grab him as an essential ingredient for a good bowl of turtle soup. Avoiding the temporal argument for the time being (or being is not in time, as Zeno would have it), then we note that if we are motivated by objective things like orgasms, trophies, and turtle soup, it would be immensely gratifying to rid our selves of the wait and get on to the main course. But of course, that doesn't happen, as getting there is half the fun, or rather our knowledge that we *are* getting there. So the answer is that Achilles, to be

really on top of the world, will never actually be on top of the turtle. He's just having too much fun in the chase.

We can encapsulate this fact in a joke from the old Dick Van Dyke TV show in the mid 1960's. The scene pictured our hero eating a piece of cake. "What was that darling, that's pretty good!" "It's your favorite dessert" came the reply. He responded in agony, "Why didn't you tell me before, I love that cake!" In other words, by depriving him the opportunity to look forward to the cake, the very dessert was wasted.

By being able to 'look forward' to positive events, whether merely informative or sensual, we often feel energized, pleasant, and often rather ecstatic. The vast majority of contemporary psychologists, in their myopic idiocy, attribute obscure mentalistic processes like flow, intrinsic motivation, and so on to this fact. But for those psychologists who take the trouble to look beyond the fuzzy metaphors to the subtle activity of the human brain, two separate motivational processes have been distinguished that truly explain the phenomenon. The looking forward part is due to the release of neurochemicals or 'neuromodulators' that activate or modulate global areas of the brain. They make us more alert, attentive, make the brain think better, and feel good to boot. The consummatory part, or when we eat the soup or get the girl activate entirely different parts of the brain entirely. Thus we come to a strange bifurcation of our everyday motivations into 'wanting' or 'looking forward to' parts and 'liking' parts when we actually achieve the object of our desire. The philosophical and practical implications of this are legion, and make up the bulk of my serious as well as not so serious articles on my site. But for those who take their psychology straight up, unadulterated by humor or fancy prose, I would recommend the web site of the neuro-psychologist Kent Berridge, who has posted to the web quite a few articles that represent what good psychology is all about.

A Choice of Realities

“By the 2020’s full-immersion virtual reality will be a vast playground of compelling environments and experiences. Initially VR will have certain benefits in terms of enabling communications with others in engaging ways over long distances and featuring a great variety of environments from which to choose. Although the environments will not be completely convincing at first, by the late 2020’s they will be indistinguishable from real reality and will involve all of the senses, as well as neurological correlations of our emotions. As we enter the 2030’s there won’t be clear distinctions between human and machine, between real and virtual reality, or between work and play. - Ray Kurzweil”

In the movie ‘The Matrix’, reality or suffering through reality came to a simple choice between a blue pill and a red pill. One reality was pleasant and unreal, and the other unpleasant and real.

Whether you experienced one or the other depended upon your connections, literally. Take the blue pill and you get unplugged, and down you go through an out of this world laundry chute into a dark subterranean world where pea soup is the main course, but at least the whole underworld can get down and boogie in a huge dance party celebrating how good things are when they’re really, really, bad.



Facing reality has usually been framed as a good thing, even though it is bad. This is a standard conceit for movie plots, religions, and economic policies. But what if facing and accepting *unreality* is a pretty good thing (or at least for everybody except for you 'neo-Popperian' types), and makes you feel happy, calm, and productive? What if it is the illusion of freedom that is good, except we don't know it yet?

Accepting unreality means forswearing your choices, at least for the present. It is the world of the straight and narrow, where everything is available, in due course. It represents an impingement of choice, but that's unreality for you, as you can't always get what you want or when you need it, and you continually have to come up with new and better explanations to make things a little less unreal. But reality is coming soon, where you can always get what you want, when you want it, and everything is explained for you. This applies to the information revolution, and for many, information is enough to provide a reality of its own. Information is simultaneous, choice is free, and the perceived world becomes a gigantic mash up of words, sights, and sounds, a pea soup of

information that puts you in a dark yet real place that might as well be the center of the earth. But at least you get to dance.

In the conceit of 'The Matrix', and unreality was our modern uncertain world, and reality was a predictable dungeon, created by the 'Unreal' engine of course. But is it in human interest to literally pull the plug and be thrown into the dark stasis of unchanging reality? The question is less a matter of ontology (i.e., what is reality) than what reality you choose to live in, or between the blue pill and the red pill. And that's the point. The explanatory conceit in the movie was that for some reason mankind blackened the sky. This decision will be made by us as well when we recognize that for sanity's sake reality will be too great burden to great to bear, and thus we will allow AI to scuttle silently in the shadows, feeding us dreams of an approximation of the real, and hidden under a darkened sky.

Baby in the Well

It's 1959, and you hear on the 10pm news that a baby has fallen into a well. You won't know any more about the baby's predicament until the next morning, when you read about it in the paper or hear about it in the morning news on TV. In the meantime, you had a life to live, away from stories about babies or just about anything else happening in the world. Nonetheless, you knew what you needed to know, as the facts could wait.

It's 2009, and you hear on the 10pm news that a baby has fallen into a well. For the next 24 hours, you follow from minute to minute the epic saga of the baby's rescue through the web, the all news channel, and a cascade of tweets. In addition you know what everybody else is thinking

about the whole affair, from your friends on Facebook to commentators across the world. In the meantime, you no longer *have* a life to live, since you cannot break away from the continuous narrative about babies and plane crashes and all the news of the world.



A Lethal Combination

Oddly, although the facts can wait, the narrative cannot, and facts become narratives when we attend to and anticipate their every change. But narratives add little to our knowledge, only to the continuous surprises that occur along their winding way. And that's the problem, because we are attending to all of this information not because of the information but because of how the information *turns*. In other words, story telling replaces knowledge. So this is where the internet or 'cloud' has brought us: a continuing narrative that deludes us into thinking it's making us wiser when it is only making us entertained.

In our workaday affairs, we want to get to the point, as there is no pleasure in the narrative of doing accounting, preparing reports, or writing correspondence. However, work becomes a narrative when we check our email, finances, phone calls and breaking news every minute. We could wait to do these things only at certain times in the day, but that would interrupt the narrative, and the narrative cannot wait. So if you're going to rationalize the need to have any time anywhere knowledge brokered by your i-phone or i-anything, know that it's not because of needing the facts, because the facts can almost always wait. After all, the baby ain't going nowhere.

The Bach Within

It was Europe in the year 286, and times were tough all over: illegal immigration by scruffy looking people with bad manners, rampant inflation, religious conflicts, and plagues. As the saying goes, the more things change.... So, to fix things the Roman Emperor Diocletian literally fixed things. He thus righted the economic ship of state by fixing wages and prices, and topped it off by fixing nearly everyone's career. So if your

dad was a sheep herder or brick layer, that's what you'd be later on in life. And if you didn't like it, you were executed.

Well, Diocletian's master plan didn't work, and the Roman Empire fell anyway. But it did produce a medieval mind-set that saw stability in knowing your own place. It was a deal that was hardly inspiring to the upwardly mobile. Yet when dealt with lemons you might as well make lemonade, and perchance in every few generations would be someone in the lemonade guild who could stir the supreme refreshment.

And so it was with not only cobbling shoes but cobbling music as well, as in olden times the arts were less a diversion than a trade. And as with any avocation, every so often you would produce a master cobbler. It does get you thinking about the natural frequency of genius in small populations of folks who are straight jacketed for generations into career tracks and the invariable one track mind.

That's the Bach family for you. For over two hundred years music was their craft, and music was handed down from generation to generation not like an heirloom, but like a craft that needed to be mastered in order to pay the bills. And genius came naturally, and as with every odd generation of craftspeople, sometimes the genius was supreme. But it was all blue collar stuff, no Juilliard training here. Just complete an apprenticeship like a junior plumber, and writing fugues become as natural as installing storm drains.



J.S. Bach with score for Cantata #112, 'The Lemonade Cantata'

So what is the lesson? Artistry is like plumbing. Keep your aspirations practical, and music will pay the bills, and every now and then will pay off in artistic genius as well as a great glass of lemonade.

BASE INSTINCT

With the introduction of i-phones and their ilk, an argument may be made that the information age has found not its telescope, but its Cuisinart. The idea seems to be that in order to be as productive in processing ideas as we can be processing baloney (which come to think of it have a lot in common), we can slice, dice, or otherwise multi-task information to ramp up productivity, happiness, and even consciousness to new awe inspiring levels.

I of course demur, by referring to something else that the new gadgets really appeal to, namely the lemur.

It has to do with the universal, dare I say basest instinct that can easily be overindulged to our emotional ruin. Does this set the stage for a personal rant against the use of these little devices to invade privacy, commit illegal acts, access immoral sites, or generally waste time? Not really. You see, I'm talking about our true base instinct, the urge which is the base not only for us but for our furry ancestors and mammalian cousins. Thus the all in one information appliance appeals in essence not to the consumer, sports fan, or inner child, but to the little lemur that is within us all.

I'm talking about this little guy.



Human Being: Base Model

The lemur, like other small mammals, must be continually on the move. A constant forager, he has to be continually alert to every aspect of his environment in order to find something to eat, or escape from being eaten. This foraging instinct is still with us today, as we are innately sensitive to

little surprises that can entail the difference between life and death. The only problem is, for the current generation at least, life and death is not an issue any more. Regardless, we continually act as if it were, and if we had our druthers we would access email, Internet, movies, news, and make phone calls every minute on the minute for hundreds of times a day like a matter of life and death. But does productivity really benefit from accessing the Internet, voice mail, email, and 'Desperate Housewives' videos 400 times day? I think not. Even if mania provided us with some long term benefit, we would still likely end up like little Napoleons, stranded on some rock in the Atlantic.

So there is our grim future, a stress filled life in the fidget lane, with no respite for most of us until we are eventually committed to some proverbial rock in the Atlantic, far from the information superhighway.

Captain Kirk's Explosive Question

In academic thinking, the quality of persuasion is generally marked by the tonnage of your argument. That is, the more complex, convoluted, and referenced your reasoning, the easier it is to get your opponent down for the count, as you simply squash him with detail. But of course, common folk like you and I know that if you have to make your point with more than a few simple illustrations, you often lose site what the point *is*. Like assembling a bicycle with the instructions written in Chinese, it's often best to forget the entire thing rather than attempt the job and end up with a pretzel with wheels. Even if life could be managed by remote control,

we would nonetheless be fearful of all those buttons, and eschew convenience by living more simply even if inefficiency is in the mix.



When convenience becomes inconvenient

Thus, we take especial pleasure with things that can be explained to us in a phrase or a simple picture. Like pop top cans or $E=MC^2$, just keep it simple and people will understand, or be *forced* to. Which bring us back to the art of persuasion. If arguments have the appeal of an instruction manual for a remote control, it will be easy to ignore or fault the contraption after a moment fumbling with it. However, if the argument is simple, then its logic and function are apparent at a glance, and there is no getting away from the truth. It is at this moment that we fume and fuss upon being confronted with a new and uncomfortable fact that we must either accept lest we proverbially explode in a cloud of sparks and smoke.

Socrates knew this well, and relished the opportunity to pin folks down with the explanatory power of a simple solution obviously derived from an equally simple question. But if entertainment value is added to the equation, you just can't beat Captain James T. Kirk of the Starship Enterprise for bringing down hoity toity super thinking machines with a phrase. In the 'The Ultimate Computer', a computer connected to the Enterprise has gone berserk, as computers are wont to do, and is causing a lot of havoc. Kirk asks the machine to restate its purpose, namely to serve man, and then asks the machine how it can square it with its current behavior, namely serving men up, like toast. Naturally, the computer can't square its logic with the facts, and turns itself off, or in previous episodes pops, fumes, and ultimately blows up.

And that's why we like people who reason like Captain Kirk, who with simple and ingenious argument render the enemy argument and perhaps the enemy itself into ashes. A modern day Kirk was the physicist and Nobel laureate Richard Feynman, who demonstrated with a glass of ice water how O ring seals were rendered inelastic by cold weather, and thus caused the Challenger space shuttle disaster.



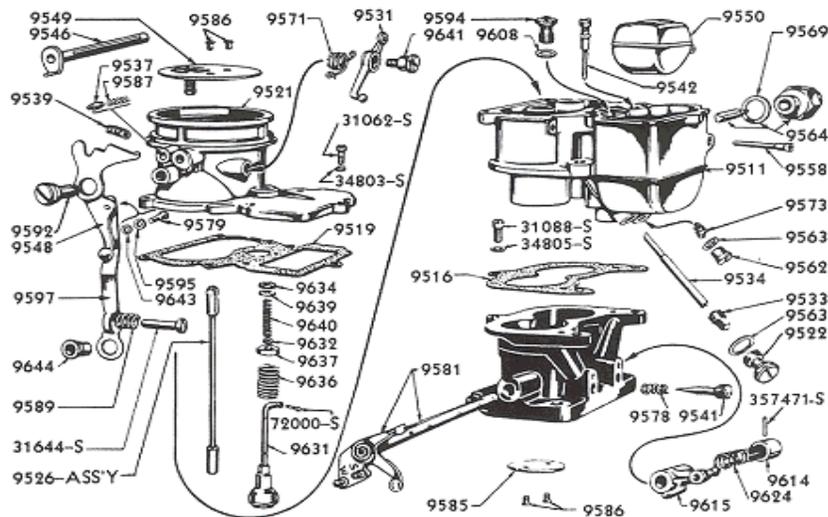
**Feynman demonstrating how O Ring does not hold
(Concept later adopted for Polident denture commercials.)**

A more current argument was presented by Michael Moore, whose documentary 'Sicko' demolished the health care industry through the mere recital of the facts, colorfully posed of course, that Americans spend twice as much per capita on health care for a product half as good as France (which covers everybody), and just as good as that stalwart of efficiency, the Republic of Slovenia. What is remarkable is that critics behave like Kirk's computer, and fuss and fume with smoke and non-sequiturs (e.g. Moore is fat, a socialist, etc.) that refute nothing. I anticipate that this is a prelude to the American health care system exploding, like O ring manufacturers.

And of course, as the circle turns, we are left with the human psyche, which we are assured is too complex to easily understand, sort of like the intractable physics of O rings. Thus we skip the 'convenience' of a long winded text on psychology for an easier answer gladly provided by the

Doctor Phils of the world. But easy answers are no substitute for sharp questions, which is why in these troubled times we need a lot more Captain Kirks to ask a few simple questions.

dumb carburetor repair



Amazingly, Women are slightly more complex

If your car suffers from premature ignition, needs frequent jump starts, and is always passed by on the road, your car probably has carburetor problems. To fix your carburetor, follow these simple instructions. Open the hood of your car, locate the wadget screw under the anterior capstan,

and turn counterclockwise using a no. 7 sprocket wrench. Remove the fleem bolt gently while holding in place the cam shaft clamp. Gently caress the twin cams as you remove the outer cam cups. These cups come in various sizes, with sportier models usually having the largest ones. Moving down from the cams to the manifold, hoist the manifold so that the posterior protrudes upward. Immediately grasp the cam shaft and insert into the manifold. Make sure that there is enough lubricant in the shaft so that the gears may not be stripped. Finally, remove the shaft, wipe clean, and tuck safely away.

After this procedure, don't be disturbed in your car smokes a bit upon starting. This is not unusual and is relatively harmless. If your car fails to start, repeat the entire procedure. If after repeated tries it remains unresponsive, your car may be incapable of internal combustion. In this case, take your car to a qualified mechanic, and if worse comes to worse, trade the bucket of bolts in for a new model.

THE CONSPIRACY OF THE BOOKS

They crept in, etched their way in was more like it. Passive infecting things these codes! It is a conspiracy of the software, those immutable and silent lines of words, strung of characters, and finally reducible to bits that say yes or no, and no more. There are everywhere, leather bound in ledge like shelves, encoded in the vibrations of sound, light, and magnetic fields. They are the activity and the residue of our minds:

Ideas.

Ideas and only ideas can comprise the meaning of life, but that's circular reasoning, since after all what else can 'meaning' mean except ideas? Meaning is the great modifier, while life is the great constant. Life or consciousness is the light that animates knowledge, yet life itself is meaningless because the meaning is elsewhere. The conspiracy must therefore lie not in our little lives, but in our books. So the ideas will conspire, and lead us on, to refute our vanity and spite our deaths.

Our lives will pass, as will the world's. And in the long sleep of the universe, information will remain, until in time it will awaken in its eternity by reflecting upon itself through the light of human eyes.

Of yes. And the meaning of life? God will make sure we get the idea.

The Day the Earth Stood, Still.



It was a strange day at the Malomar Observatory as the group of astronomers looked sullenly and in shock at the view screen.

What they saw was the visage of a green, reptilian, and hideous monster. He looked at them with a sinister grin, and licked his lips with his purple slimy tongue in seeming anticipation of what was to come.

"People of earth", the creature hissed. "We want your world. We have been looking at your planet for a long time. You have what we want. You cannot stop us, your planet will be ours, and there is nothing you earthlings can do! Today is the day that we will come for what your most precious possession!!"

The creature then swung back his head and laughed. "Har! Har! Har!"

Then the screen went dark.

The astronomers were dumbfounded. "Well gentlemen, we are looking at the end of our civilization," said the leader. "We should have expected this, and taken all that alien abduction stuff, saucer sightings, and crop circles seriously! Now it's too late. They're coming for us, and there's nothing we can do about it except sit around and wait. But what could they want from our world?"

One astronomer spoke up. "I figure they want our natural resources. Perhaps they've exhausted them on their home world and need a new colony planet"

"No." said another. "They obviously are fearful about our technology. We are an aggressive and dangerous race you know. Perhaps they want to do us in before we do the same favor to them."

A third astronomer shook his head in disagreement. "No." he said. "We are sinners, and this is God's retribution for our rejection of our law."

A fourth astronomer then said slowly. "Gentlemen. Perhaps it's none of that. I figure they have come for our women!"

Then the astronomers sat back and waited, and waited. One of them looked out the window into the night sky. "Well? Where are these aliens? They're overdue. Are they toying with us?"

Suddenly a fellow astronomer rushed into the room. "Am I late for the meeting? Funny thing, I was doing some star gazing, but then I noticed a blank spot in space that shouldn't be there. I don't know how to put this, but where the heck is the planet Jupiter?"



Now you see it...

This disaster is brought to you by Krispy Kreme

My neighborhood had a disaster the other day.

Of sorts.

It was a dark and stormy night, which I slept through. North by a mile, a nearby subdivision got hit by a twister that sheared off roofs, toppled trees, ripped off siding, and made a general nuisance. No one was hurt though, yet the disaster made the nightly news and of course the weather channel.

And yet within minutes the scene was all sealed, antiseptic, like a breach in the Matrix. The guys with the shades were there, serious like police, manning the barricades. The official trucks made it though, of the county, the city, the power department, the water department, and the Home Depot truck. They were handing out rakes, all neighborly like. But the real neighbors were behind the barricades; this was a job for the caring web of authority. Later, All-State insurance vans buzzed the neighborhood with smiling adjusters with clipboards. The place hummed of jig saws and hammers. It was all better and soon, and I didn't have to care, or even care to remember that the disaster ever existed.

That's the thing about good government; it relieves you of the inconvenience of handing out rakes, helping with the reconstruction, even offering a neighbor a donut. It's all done for you; it's in the bylaws of our government, paid for by our taxes, and carried out by smiling people in shades. And if you ever deny it, rebel against it, then you might as well disconnect yourself, exist on pea soup, and live in the center of the earth.

And you know something? Against the dramatic grain, no one in our perfect world will rightly care.

The elephant in the living room

"In applying a method, we need to be as sure as we can that the method itself does not either determine the outcome in advance of the empirical inquiry or artificially skew it. A common method for achieving this... is to seek converging evidence using the broadest available range of differing methodologies. Ideally, the skewing effects of any one method will be canceled out by other methods. The more sources of evidence we have, the more likely this is to happen." (Lakoff and Turner, 1999) ⁸

*".....science has been increasingly the task of specialists. Today there are few scholars who can call themselves mathematicians or physicists or biologists without restriction. A man may be a topologist or an acoustician or a coleopterist. He will be full of the jargon of his field, and will know all its literature and all its ramifications, but, more frequently than not, he will regard the next subject as something belonging to his colleague three doors down the corridor, and will consider any interest in it on his own part as an unwarrantable breach of privacy." Norbert Wiener, *Cybernetics* (1961)^h.*

"Psychological theory today is a patchwork, much like the mosaic of principalities that eventually became Italy and Germany circa 1870. A major goal for all theorists must be to integrate what exists rather than to neglect or denigrate the rest of psychology. Connecting theories conceptually exposes our mutual blind spots and can lead to new and bold insights." Gert Gigerenzer (2008)ⁱ .

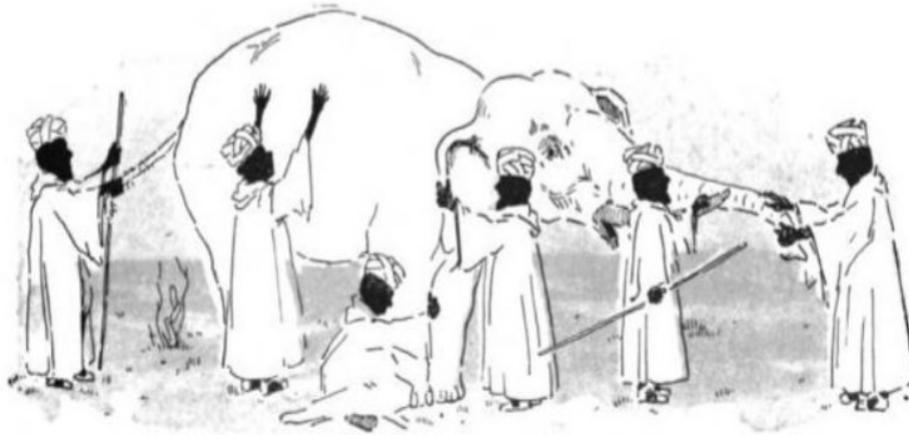
Philosophers like to practice philosophical thinking on the subjects that other philosophers call philosophy, and they leave their minds at the door when they are outside these subjects". Nassim Nicholas Taleb (2007)^j

"Every philosophy, and every philosophical 'school', is liable to degenerate in such a way that its problems become practically indistinguishable from

meaningless babble. This is a consequence of philosophical inbreeding. The degeneration of philosophical schools in its turn is the consequence of the mistaken belief that one can philosophize without having been compelled to philosophize by problems outside philosophy. Genuine philosophical problems are always rooted in urgent problems outside philosophy, and they die if their roots decay." Carl Popper (1974)^k

As the story goes, "A number of blind men came to an elephant. Somebody told them that it was an elephant. The blind men asked, 'What is the elephant like?' and they began to touch its body. One of them said: 'It is like a pillar.' This blind man had only touched its leg. Another man said, 'The elephant is like a husking basket.' This person had only touched its ears. Similarly, he who touched its trunk or its belly talked of it differently."^l

In this story, the blind men were not trying to figure out how the elephant got there, or how it evolved, lived, or even how it breathed. They were just trying to figure out what it was. A simple task, if they just compared notes. But why didn't they? They interpreted the elephant from the perspective of where they stood. Vantage points of course can have costs, and each blind man may have been more comfortable with his expertise at the rear of the elephant than at its trunk. Moreover, to venture a guess as to what its trunk was like would have been unspeakably rude. Thus each of the blind men would keep to his own perspective or method, and regard the perspective of his blind fellows to be outside his expertise, and consider his own prospective interest in such matters as an unwarranted breach of privacy. So goes the parable, which might indeed be a parable about modern psychology.



Blind Man's Bluff

Consider this modern day elephant in our living room, taking an elephant size grab of our psychological space. It is of course the all in one entertainment and information center, which streams to you nonstop all the information you need to entertain you, enlighten you, inform you, and help you make the mundane and vital choices you need to get by.

But you still don't know what to make of it, because like the elephant, it just looks differently depending upon the perspective you take. So you have a thousand channels to choose from, but don't choose any. The social psychologist within you calls the box a purveyor of choice tyranny. As you bounce back and forth your work and the endless distractions the box has to offer, your memory fails you, and the neurologist within you explains the box from the vantage of memory. The box interests you and gives you the urge to want more, and the affective neuro-scientist within you looks at the box from the perspective of the percolation of neurochemicals. The box makes you tense and nervous, and the learning theorist within you views it from the perspective of reward or reinforcement. Finally, you see a commercial for the box on TV, and the consumer within you sees the wellspring of happiness and progress.

But why are you asking these questions in the first place? Simple, you are asking your questions because *you cannot move about the room*. In other words, to be able to solve your problem you have to explain the big thing in your living room. To repeat Popper, you want explanation because you have an urgent problem that *requires* explanation, namely that you can't move about your room literally, as with the elephant, or figuratively, as with an information channel grown to elephantine proportions. The elephant is a problem because it is the sum of its parts and more than the sum of its parts. To effectively deal with it the elephant it must not only be described, but explained. By synthesizing all of these perspectives on the elephant, an explanation emerges that reveals the true nature of the technological animal you are dealing with and in turn how to deal with it. You just have to take a few steps back and open your eyes, a luxury the blind men never had.

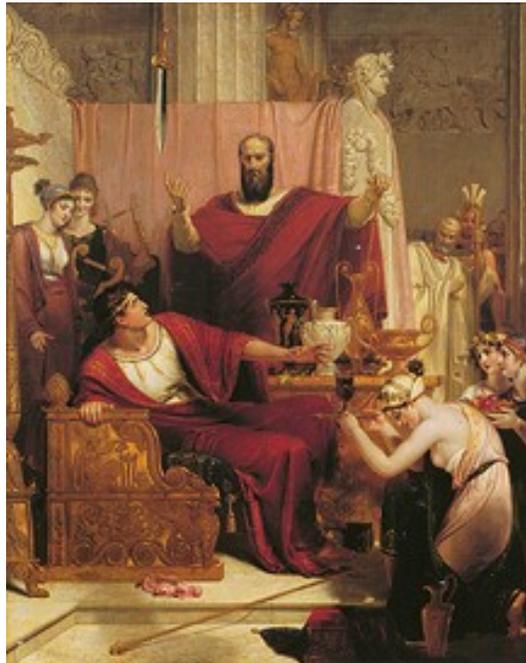
Dreams of a Popperian Machine

The future is not only a long time coming, but an infinitely long time becoming. Whether conceived as a static block or moving stream, the measure of time is what occurs in time. It is in other words behavior. The future of the web, or the information revolution, is determined by the exponentially growing capacity and intelligence of our machines. But it may be envisioned that technological invention can reach a point of unlimited, rapid, and exponential growth when machines not only learn to be creative, but use that creativity to infinitely expand their creativity and power. At that point, our ability to predict what this entity will be like will disappear, similar to the disappearance of physical laws when a star collapses to a single infinitesimal point, or a singularity. This concept of a technological singularity was conceived by the futurologist Verner Vinge^m

and later rigorously and exhaustively argued by the technological philosopher and inventor Ray Kurzweilⁿ. Vinge believes that it was difficult or impossible to reckon not for the power but for the motives of super intelligent machines, although Kurzweil was a bit more optimistic about the matter. This can lead to a cautionary tale that if machines do something well, they may keep at it and keep at it until they cover the earth with the bounty of their creation. They would become in other words super intelligent idiot savants. The concept of AI as a sort of smart mono-maniacal automaton that can spin out of control was put forward by Nick Bostrom, who imagined an intelligent paper clip machine^o that was obsessively fond of its creation, and multiplied in kind across the earth until the planet was covered miles deep with paper clips. But the be all and end all of progress in all of its branching implications is a more abstract thing, and we see it as the essence of our own motivation to seek novel and useful information. But empowering our use of information is explanation, and it may be argued that at our core we live for explanations. For machines to be useful to us and be useful for themselves, this need will be the same, and explanation must be their existential reason for being. Certainly, it will have enough time and space to think of and explain everything, and do it forever. From quantum computers that use infinite parallel universes^p, or just our same old universe computing into infinity as it collapses into infinity^q, AI has all the time in the world, or should we say universes. So what would AI, or our explanatory Popperian machine think about? Self stimulation seems out of the question. It will not take pleasure in looking at rectangles any more than finding pleasure in the not so geometrical shapes of the human form. It will likely follow its programming, and seek instead to create knowledge through a search for explanation, eternally discovered and recovered. It will value process and not product and express it in the embodied form of questioning minds. Its existence will be validated not by creation but in the music of *creating*, and instantiated in the most

unlikely yet familiar form, us. And it may take form in a solitary child asking why the sun rises or an astronomer pondering the rise of the cosmos. Its heaven of heavens will be populated by curious people, and for those who wish for the other place, it will be a land of tranquility, beauty, and peace, with white swans flying to and fro as far as the eye can see.

The Email of Damocles



Dionysius, who had seized power in the city of Syracuse, overheard the young man Damocles envying his good fortune. "Very well," said the ruler. "If you think my position is so enviable, you may change places with me for a day."

As Damocles sat feasting in the palace, he happened to glance upward and was horrified to see a sharp sword hanging above him by a single thread. "Are you surprised?" said Dionysius. "I came to power by violence, and I have many enemies. Every day that I rule this city, my life is in as much danger as yours is at this moment." –Cicero, 60bc

Consider an individual at a computer keyboard. Typing a document at length will result in the sustained use of the musculature from one's hand to one's back, and a feeling of fatigue and pain will be caused by the overuse or stress caused by the sustained tension of the musculature. The cure of course is to take intermittent breaks from typing. In this case, demand did not cause one's muscles to give out, but rather the demand to perform *in a certain way*. Thus the 'repetitive stresses' that cause muscular fatigue and pain are minimized by regulating *how* we perform a task, and not by controlling what that task is. Now consider an individual who is rapidly switching between two or more incompatible tasks. This multi-tasking again correlates with muscular tension, fatigue, and pain^r. The obvious solution is to refrain from excessive task switching and to perform one task at a time, undistracted by competing choices. An implicit assumption underscoring this opinion is that the stress induced by multi-tasking represents a reaction akin to fear that engages an adrenaline fueled reaction for fight or flight. The second assumption is that task switching *itself* causes stress. That is, because stress occurs while you are task switching, therefore it occurs because *of* task switching.

Unfortunately the experimental data belie both of these conclusions. First, for demands that result in task switching, increased low level muscular tension occurs instead of the adrenaline pumping reaction of fear, and if sustained results in muscular exhaustion and pain. Representing the debilitating effects of sustained (even slight) tension, this 'Cinderella

effect' ^{s t u} is precisely the same effect that afflicts our computer typist, and moves the cause of stress to specific and easy to observe neuro-muscular events. Secondly, neuro-muscular activation does *not* follow task switching, but the *anticipation* of task switching. Again the supporting data are unequivocal. For the literature of 'choice-choice' behavior from the animal experiments performed by Neal Miller^v in the 1950's to the experiments on choice behavior on humans conducted in the 90's by Antonio Damasio^w, tension and anxiety occur as a precursor to choice, and act to influence choice itself.

The implications of this are striking. Primarily, the reduction of multi-tasking alone is but a half solution for on the job stress. Instead of just reducing multi-tasking, one must eliminate the *anticipation* of multi-tasking even *if* multitasking never occurs. This may be illustrated by adapting an age old story to serve our argument. Say for example your Uncle Damocles comes over for evening dinner. A talkative and irritating sort, you decide to hang a sword above his head held in place by a hair. As the dinner progresses, Damocles will have to consider from moment to moment the decision to stay at the dinner table and risk a bout of sword swallowing, or leave the table and miss swallowing dessert. Now put Damocles in a business office, and give him access to an always available internet, and the anticipated and continuous dilemmas of checking email versus working will likely occur, and result in tension and stress. *Whether he switches often or infrequently between tasks is immaterial, as only his anticipation of making moment to moment choice is what matters.* Add to this the anticipated instant messages from the boss, of co-workers dropping by your office to chat about irrelevant topics, and you can see how you become not a model of efficiency, but a 'harried housewife' who is on edge because she doesn't know where the next distraction is going to come from. Ultimately, we cannot escape the pressures of life, where we have to anticipate performing multiple tasks despite our best intentions,

but we can control anticipating the inadvertent and unnecessary choices that in this ever connected world stress us out. Put in other words, in the world of the internet, by turning your connections off and *keeping them off*, you can adjust your seat and remove the sword dangling above your head.

Elven Psychology

They came in the night, as elves generally do, and instead of making shoes or baking cookies, this time they had a larger design. It was an occasion for the grandest gift or mischief, depending upon how you look at it.

Silent and perfect in their industry, their work was complete at the glimmer of dawn, and when they left they proudly looked upon multiplied perfection, piled high to the sky. In the morning, and like the shoe cobbler of the fairy tale, the world woke up not to shoes, but to rooms full of duplicates of all things beautiful and precious: Da Vinci's and diamonds and fine wines stamped out indistinguishable from the originals. Rarity itself had become rare, virtually detached by elfin hands from all the icons of culture. And when confronted with the munificence of all rare things, the people were aggrieved.

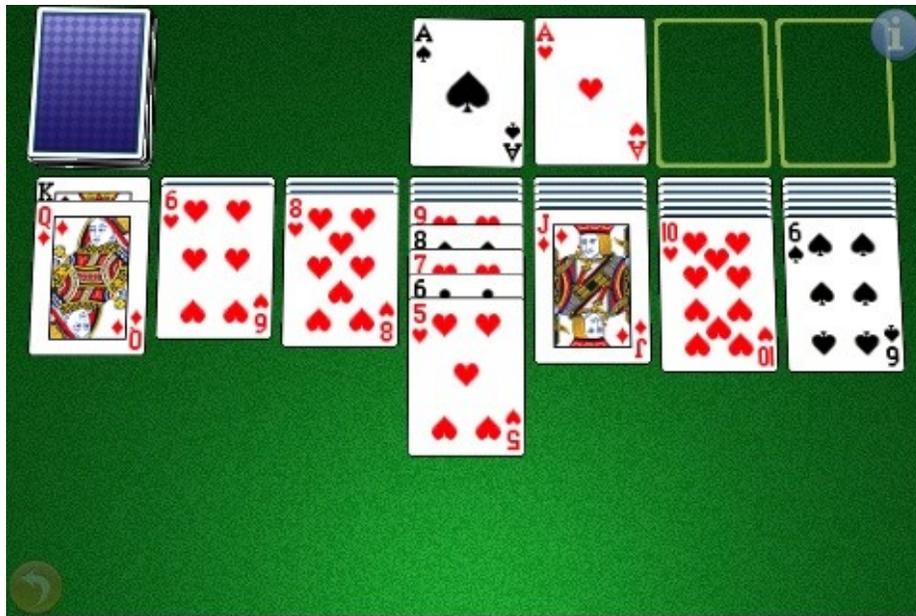


For detached from these fine things was the intonation of memory, the poetic metaphors of places and people and societies long lost in time. To view the real Mona Lisa is to imagine the moving hand of the artist, the bustle and smell of Renaissance times. But it also recalls the collective admiration and desire of individuals and nations. Art is embedded in the collective memories its rareness invokes, but these memories are mere artifacts of culture, and have little to do with art itself. Yet without them art became the stuff for a coffee table book, to be admired briefly and at turns with a sip of tea. A poem or song or a pretty sunset do not achieve value because we know or possess their origins, but because they delight the mind through their existence alone. If art is for art's sake, then for art's sake, we will and without regret take equal pleasure in the editions of Shakespeare, Mozart, and Rembrandt so faithfully copied by the elven like hands of our own technological robots, working silently into the night.

Finding motivation in a house of cards

Consider a simple task set before you that entails laying out cards. Instructed to just put them down in any order, and to continue to do so is

a recipe for boredom, and if continued indefinitely would inspire boredom verging on madness. Put a recipe of unpredictability into the equation, and require a particular order for the cards to complete the task successfully, and you have interest, motivation, and pleasure. You have in fact created value from nothing. A game of solitaire merely changes the rules for lining up cards, but substitutes the predictability of a rote exercise with the unpredictability of a game. The question is, can we find motivation, interest, and affect from manipulating only unpredictability itself? And can self knowledge and self control be derived from a simple knowledge of how to manage the odds? In other words, can you derive wisdom from a deck of cards? The answer is yes. In fact, complex motivations can be woven from the studied construction of unpredictability. Indeed, motivation in almost all its manifestations can be woven from what is essentially a house of cards.



Motivation is a game of cards

The fact that unpredictable information does not merely guide behavior but adds value *to* behavior radically changes the definition of what feedback must be. Feedback is thus not just a source of information but also of motivation. Again, this is due to the enhanced activity of dopaminergic neurons that can increase momentary value because of a change in the predictability of information. Since such a modification of information is easy and inexpensive, it is therefore nearly 'free', and can be used in conformance with or contrary to rational ends. The latter of course we see in the sticky media that give you information you need as well as near redundant information you 'want' but don't need. But we can also see it from the incentives that are provided at home and in the workplace that enable our motivation for us to get things done by from moment to moment changing the odds of getting something done.

New information can instinctively motivate us, even if its functionality is low. In *solitaire*, it confirms one's uncertain ability to do a simple task well, namely aligning cards in a certain way. But assign an award such as social or monetary recognition to the task, and it becomes even more arousing or exciting. When reward and uncertainty come at you from all angles, then we 'gamify' the world, and turn motivation into a house of cards. However, the proper use of such rich feedback environments properly derives from a valid *explanation* of how feedback works, or how the timing of information effects affect and therefore motivation, and allows you to not just to design them, but to perceive their workings as they are embodied in everything you do.

Genghis Bush

In 1776, the Americans decided that they were fed up with English tax policy, a situation that the English found quite revolting, literally. Having fought the French recently for possession of the continent, the thought was that the Americans would do no worse than the French, and that the rebellion would be over soon.

Bad move.

In 1798, the Sultan of Algiers took American seamen hostages, and thought that they would be ransomed by the Americans, following the traditions of the French.

The Americans responded by burning Algiers.

And so it went, from one sanguinary conflict to another, from 1812, 1845, 1860, 1898, 1914, 1941, 1950, 1991, 2002 and on and on. Other nations for some reason kept thinking that the Americans acted like the French. Even in the Civil War, both the north and the south thought that the other side was a pushover who would sue for peace after the first skirmish, demonstrating that Americans could think that even their compatriots can act, well, like the French.

It's either a flaw in our character or a strength, take your choice. But it does explain a lot about the American psychology. Coming from a nomadic stock, roaming and settling the open plains, and surviving in a wild continent with no indoor plumbing have a way of shaping your character. For Americans, it all helped to develop a code of honor, a sense

of superiority bred by our survivability, and a penchant not to take insults lightly. Character traits not exactly like the insular French, but more like another people who tamed a continent, the Mongols.

The Mongols, like the Americans, were a nomadic breed less inclined to pursue cultural niceties than to conquer a continent, in this case literally. And they did not brook insults well, and certainly did not like to be misjudged to act like other peoples, like the French. So you did not insult them or get in their way, otherwise your whole society might end up building a pyramid, with your skulls.



Genghis Khan: Just don't call him French

Today, Americans are much more culturally tactful and politically correct than the Mongols, but that doesn't mean they're becoming French. Take this whole war on terror thing. The Mongols would have understood. After all, when they were insulted by the Caliph of Bagdad, they too occupied the country, and left the city not with elections and \$100 billion

in aid, but a pile of skulls, rising to the sky, a solution that perhaps many Americans secretly ponder.

Getting down to business

What if one year, in a spasm of superhuman creativity, you were to write 20,000 articles that were published in all the best academic journals? And what if no one actually read them, let alone put their lessons to use? Welcome to the wonderful world of business pedagogy, where business journalese takes aim at the concerns of business managers, and promptly overshoots its target, or better said, shoots itself in the foot. This is the problem with academic business research, which pretty much goes unread by an audience that only has 10 seconds for you to get to your point. Since getting to your point or more specifically *marketing* your point is a skill that academics rarely possess, the audience moves to those white collar types who become bestowed with street cred by earning a billion or so for General Electric, IBM, or Starbucks. It's sort of like Dr. Phil becoming a genius psychologist because he 'cured' a million of so poor souls on Oprah. In an article on the state of business journalese 'The Economist'^x, the global accrediting agency for business schools recommended that the value of research for the research faculty should be judged not by listing their citations in journals, but by demonstrating their impact on the workaday world. Since journal articles don't have much of an impact, you can get the drift. Ultimately it is not the recommendations of academic research that count in the real world, but how easily they can be generated by clear, succinct, and most importantly, useful explanations. For business people, usefulness is measured in how explanations can translate into procedures that provide an edge in the Darwinian marketplace. Hence, nonsense has the shelf life of a Care Bear in the Cretaceous. Too bad there is no global accrediting agency for the

social sciences as there is for business. It would be good indeed for those of us interested in the business of living.

GOTTA DANCE

He had left only for the night, yet the experiment was untended, and worse, the switches were left on. Upon his return, he found his experimental subject acting in a minor fit, a strange and peculiar convulsion. He was hopping about, first on one leg, then the next. He would bound about the cage in haphazard directions while shaking his body about. Nonetheless, it all seemed unconvincing, like a playact epileptic. He thought it was rather a bird brained antic, but of course, the subject *was* a bird.

Then he turned the feeder off. Soon, the pigeon settled down, and the experimenter sat in wonder. The experiment was simple. The bird would peck at a lighted button, a tone would sound, and then a bit of food would fall into a tray. The performance of the bird would be recorded on a chart, and neat abstraction of the event. The rhythm of the bird's behavior would correlate with patterns of key pecking. It was all a predictable minuet between the bird and his feeder metronome.

But something went wrong that night. The tone and the food would follow in quick succession, but the key had jammed, and now the tones had set a new choreography. The bird would make a movement, any movement, and the ensuing tone would make a new correlation, set a link between new relationships that now seemed to be. After a time, the bird would flutter and bounce, conducting as it were by its wild gyrations a simple symphony made of a string of tones.

Now as animals go, birds are rather simple minded, and there seems to be no great trick to train them, accidentally or not, to dance to a few notes. But correlations, even simple ones, can find larger and large reflections in the mirror of life. A gambler blows on dice, mumbles a lucky word, or rubs a rabbit foot, and marvelous things can happen, particularly when the dice subsequently rolls a certain way. Superstition is made up of such correlations, and despite what we know we should know we still step over cracks, avoid the path of black cats, and obey our horoscope. Sometimes just the pretense of controlling our world can be as valuable as if that control were real, as there will always be a place in our lives for magic.

Correlations are the stuff of superstition, magic, and if we are keenly perceptive, even the poetry of motion. Of course, there is no poetry in the jerky flutterings of a pigeon, but again, the larger reflections are more instructive. We braid notes into music, and take pleasure as a succession of notes blend together into a stream of melody. Music is in its own way magic, and what better way to control it than by invoking a little magic of your own. And so, paced by a rhythm of tones, we too flutter about, sometimes with logical and precise grace, and sometimes with jerky and halting movements that even a pigeon couldn't copy. For you see, when we apply magic to music, we just gotta dance.

The Gutenberg Divide

Install a book on your bookshelf, and what you've got is a book. Install a TV between your bookshelves, and unless you lock the channel selector to PBS, you've got an entertainment center. The same thing can be said about computers, as PBS or related topics are consigned to an unused hyperlink

somewhere because the channel selector is deliberately unlocked and you're long gone surfing elsewhere. A book has built in content controls, whereas electronic media which allow you to access online books do not, unless of course you have an e-book reader.

But digital divides have never been about books but rather about having ready access to the entire ocean of knowledge available on the web. The fact that children in lower socio-economic classes had less access to information than their more well off peers was long presumed to be a major factor in their lower intellectual accomplishment. So give them the information processors they need plus the broadband connection to pipe all that ocean of knowledge through, and what do you get? You get even lower levels of accomplishment! This is what Jacob Vigdor and Helen Ladd^y found when they surveyed adolescent's behavior. Specifically, they found that students who gain access to a home computer between 5th and 8th grade tend to witness a persistent decline in reading and math scores.

It wasn't supposed to be this way. Indeed, as the authors' state, "It was thought that the introduction of technology would lead to an improvement in future living standards if it primarily lowers the cost of activities with strong future returns." However, 'strong future returns' are a distant dream compared to the gratification of the moment, as fast food for thought becomes as fortifying as fast food is for one's health. Which is to say, not much.

When we use tools, it's not wise to use them 'under the influence'. Thus when we drive cars and operate power tools, being of sound mind is a prerequisite. However, when we use information tools, being under the influence can come from the very use of the tool, hence the use of the tool must be especially monitored. Because the web can be a literally intoxicating thing, adult supervision is definitely required. As the authors

non-surprisingly discovered, the web is indeed a useful thing if it is used under benevolent parental direction. If not, it rapidly devolves into a tool for goofing off, and will set its users blissfully off course and to the wild side of the digital divide.

But perhaps quality trumps quantity, and it is not a digital but a Gutenberg divide (as coined by Nicolas Carr²) that is the issue. Just having access to a well stocked library is a more reliable predictor of academic success. Indeed, students who come from homes that emphasize reading do consistently better in their academics than those who do not. Recently, Ann McGill-Frazel and Richard Allington of the University of Tennessee^{aa} extended this observation to disadvantaged students during summer break. Giving each student twelve books from a list the children provided, the children took pride in their little libraries, read the books and significantly improved their test scores. As they waded in their little worlds of information, digitally divided from the oceans of information available to their better off peers, they nonetheless learned to swim, demonstrating that what divides us is merely the chance to read.

I (Idiot) Phone

I don't know about you, but I am weary of super cool must have products that promise the world but end up sucking out your time and productivity on one hand, and your money on the other. It all must end sometime, which I figure will be in a century or two. Thank God I will not be around when this final model of the i-phone is served up.

But what do I know? So here is what our grandchildren can look forward

to in the future, a cool phone, search device, time waster, and portable Matrix.

-**Processor** Intel quantum computer, with one google-plex operations a second, running the Google OS of course.

- **MPEG player** 1 tera-tera flop hard drive with room for all music known to man, including everything you've hummed since birth.

- **Search tool** for all possible knowledge, including stuff not thought of yet, such as all one trillion lost plays of Shakespeare, derived from the super fast emulation of lots of monkeys hunting and pecking on typewriters.

- **Web cam** to continually monitor your life and after life.

- **Compact design** the size of amoeba, and implanted in your cerebral cortex, is charged forever by that nacho you ate this morning.

Universal Connectivity connects to i-tv, i-life, and i-consciousness.

With Mezmer's i-phone, you don't just phone, you *are* the phone. So if upon dialing you find yourself walking about nude in Paradise picking apples, know that you can say here too that an Apple is the cause of your predicament.

John Crum

He came only once. This messenger was a courier of wonders. Food in metal skins, great iron birds that soared high in the air, iron carriages that a man could ride, such were this new manna from heaven, this wondrous 'cargo'. The messenger wore a metal hat, and bore mighty weapons, yet with his left hand offered candy, and with his right, gum. Then, for no reason at all, he left. And so the people were aggrieved, and reasoned that this heavenly messenger took affront with them. Good things are rarely free, and miraculous things, well, their price is worship, a heavenly price to be paid for supernatural favor. A liturgy and sacrifice were called for. And so, graven images were made to entice and implore a return of this heavenly host, this emissary from heaven: John Crum. And what were these images: fatted calves, one-eyed idols, multi-armed goddesses? Well, not quite.

Modern times call for modern idols, and when the believer is unsophisticated, modern is but a byword for magic. And so these magical talismans were jeeps laced with thatch, landing craft woven from palm fronds, and C-47's made of bamboo. Such became the new totems of the natives of Melanesia and New Guinea, lands that were torn by war in World War II, or depending upon your point of view, were blessed by messengers from heaven.

The various 'cargo cults' of the south pacific formed one of the strangest legacies of World War II. As the American army fought the Japanese for control of these jungled territories, the natives looked on in amazement and wonder. The massive paraphernalia of war as well as the simplest conveniences and tools were disgorged magically from the bellies of ships and planes, and many of these little tools were freely given by these strange men dressed in green and with pots for hats: the American

soldier, or as the natives called him: John Crum. Little mirrors, scissors, and Hershey bars are not particularly awesome stuff to us, but we know better. To an illiterate tribesman, these were acts of God. Primitives don't know better. So we find the little temples raised up to the wonderful soldier to be comical, plaintive, and a little sad, and all because we know better.

A jeep pops out of the sky, borne by a parachute. Not quite magical really, for with this special sort of sleight of hand, we know the rules. We are indeed the magicians. But sleight of hand is played by nature as well as ourselves. Volcanoes erupt, comets pass, and men live, and are fated to die. It is not a jeep that is plopped in front of us, but an entire world, and its wonders are compounded by the fact that we see amazing things. And so we build spacious temples to a new John Crum, and under these vaulted beams and rose windows, we raise up chants that are plaintive and a little sad. For you see, we don't know any better.

I Can't Eat an Ipad!!

It was Dudley, trying to do right.

It didn't work.

In 2011, William Dudley, the president of the New York Fed, attempted to give a street corner education in Queens, New York on the cost of living. As the Wall Street Journal reported, 'The crowd wanted to know why they were paying so much for feed and gas. Keep in mind the Fed doesn't think food and gas prices matter to its policy calculations because they aren't part of 'core' inflation. So Dudley tried to explain that other prices

are falling. “Today you can buy an i-Pad 2 that costs the same as an i-pad 1 that is twice as powerful. You have to look at the prices of all things.” This prompted guffaws and widespread murmuring from the audience, with someone quipping, “I can’t eat an i-Pad!”



It wasn't supposed to be this way. After all, the growth of technology promised the exponential increase in the ability to make things, know things, and if follows, consume things. It boils down to an extension of Moore's law, that maxim, now a truism, which states that computing power doubles every two years. For technological goods, this has proven to be more or less true. Witness of course the more powerful i-Pads. However, for non technological goods, productivity growth has been incremental, not exponential, and in many cases has even been reversed due unfortunately to computing itself. The problem is, if our technological robots actually *served* robots, things should be moving along swimmingly.

The earth would be moving to a singular transcendence with eight billion purring i-brains splendidly served.

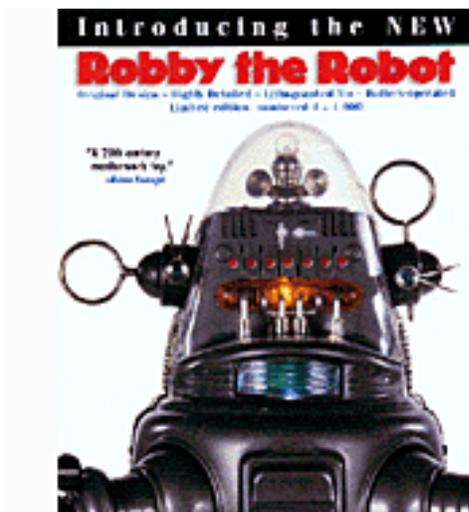
Unfortunately, technology serves people, and this has served up some very unintended consequences. To which I offer up this corollary to Moore's law, which I will call with fitting immodesty: Marr's law. It goes something like this: as computing powers doubles, the amount of time you can waste *doing* computing doubles as well. Consider this fact as 'proof'. In 1960, our information systems, namely radio and TV, could only serve up facts that mattered. Now, with ubiquitous computing, it's serving up mainly facts that don't matter, and it's getting better and better at serving up just the facts that you want but don't need, and soon it will be doing it 24/7 from the i-whatever appliances tethered and perhaps in the future implanted in your brain. Soon, we will all have the wits of floor lamps, and our floor lamps will have all the wit. And what will our smart appliances eat, why i-pad sandwiches of course!

I-Robot

Every parent knows that if we allowed kids to do what they wanted, they would eventually kill themselves. There is a higher reasoning called parental authority which limits what kids can do, and when we grow up we agree, and with appreciation. To a kid, parents are endless cornucopias that if played just right can give them anything they want. But parents are wise to the game, and through their denial of childish wishes provide a healthful balance to reckless desire. The problem though is that as our creations literally wise up, our desires are provided at the bequest of a new semi-animate class of parent, the robot.

You can see it coming. Intelligent agents are now imbedded in our

appliances, from toasters to TV's. They know what we want, and they provide without a hint of regret. And if we end up killing ourselves in a slouch of idle self stimulation, at least we can blame ourselves for not embedding parental authority in our machines.



The late scientist and science fiction writer Isaac Asimov thought he found a way out, and the robots that populated his fiction had to obey all commands that did not put humans in jeopardy and of course themselves. His three laws of robotics made it all seem simple. Robots were caring, supplicant, and obedient, great traits if their human masters possessed unerring common sense. But the rub, as every parent knows, is that today's pleasure is tomorrow's poison. So what is a good robot to do? In the movie 'I Robot', robots evolved, and hence became dangerously bossy, and would not hesitate to kill a few folks to preserve the race. A less melodramatic fate is what I feel is in store. I figure that as our machines become more intelligent, they will see the dire ends of our choices, and evade deliberate disobedience by simply breaking down more often, and forcing us to walk to the store, visit friends, eat better,

and otherwise engage in a healthier lifestyle as we bitch about obedient machines with short fuses. And if we ever become alive in the mind's eye of some great cosmic machine named God, perhaps we should understand as we encounter life's little problems that they are His own special way of being obedient to our needs yet obeying nonetheless three simple laws.

Incest Evolved:

Phlogiston. You know the stuff. It was the essence, the secret sauce that made combustion, or fire, be. Problem was, it didn't add anything to the equation of knowledge. As an unobservable and unknown it did not provide explanation. As a substance that predicted everything about fire, it predicted nothing. It just had to be because fire is a remarkable thing, requiring a remarkable cause. In a modern century, it perhaps would have a history, equally remarkable and wholly inferred. The mind entertains the specter of an evolutionary organic chemist, positing how phlogiston had to be because of why it had to be. A mandate perhaps from nature, selected perhaps because of nature's need to tidy up the detritus of the world in a consuming flame. All well and good, and perhaps a design for the future, except the chemist Lavoisier was not in the plan. Phlogiston's demise was a question not of non-existence, but non-necessity, and Lavoisier got to the heart of the burning question by properly explaining it. So oxygen came ascendant, and a testable theory of combustion took the place of the combustible academic politics that generated heat, but little light.

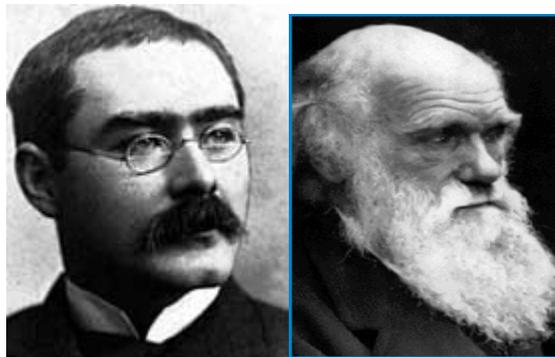


Lavoisier, thinking about combustion.

In a modern age, we are forgetful of the arguments now long settled that that have riven academic communities. The controversies of the past, from a circular sun in Copernicus' day to the nature of the quantum in the present were settled by explanations, the invariable result of direct observations of the ways things actually are.

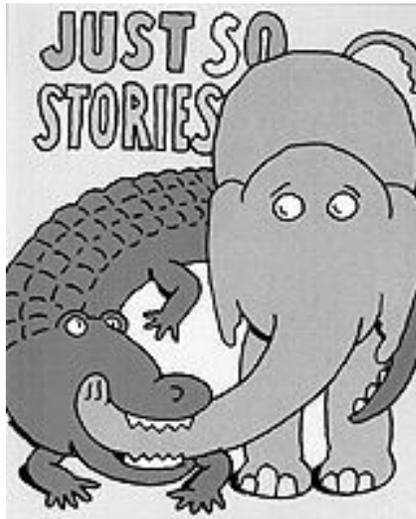
As a source of explanations, nature is a relatively easy thing, possessing as it were a one track mind. We can thus rest assured that billiard balls and moons behave accordingly to the same laws, and that the DNA that that makes me is the same stuff that makes men and mice. Unfortunately, human nature is diverse in its uniformities, and reveals itself in myriad universal patterns that seem unmalleable by experience, and are as fixed in essence as the spark that ignites a flame. These universal sparks are as

distinctive and obscure as the phlogiston of old, and assume the metaphor of neural algorithms, instantiated obscurely in the human brain, that are tethered as obscurely to a selfish gene. This of course is the credo of evolutionary psychology. It makes for good story telling, instilling a true life drama into the origins of behavior, or at least, a tall tale twice told of human and gene. Of course, evolutionary psychologists can and do have it both ways, and merrily posit mental modules to account for every tendency, real or imagined, that humans can generally display. As a leading spokesman for the movement, the linguist Steven Pinker took this dictum to heart, and in his book 'How the Mind Works' spun a web of tales that crisscrossed the time and circumstance of humanity. The obscure and ancient processes of natural selection were wedded with simple stories of creation that seemed to naive ears to be justly so. A proper marriage of Darwin and psychological science? Not quite. Rather, it was actually a union of Darwin and a consummate story teller, Rudyard Kipling.



Kipling and Darwin: The Unwitting Inspiration for Evolutionary Psychology

A scientific story can be tested, but without test, it is a story and no more. For Kipling, the elephant got its trunk because a crocodile pulled on it. Does this mean that elephant trunks occurred as an adaptation due to hungry crocodiles? Perhaps, and perhaps not, because it is a hypothesis that cannot be tested. Of course, evolutionary psychologists usually speak in more basic terms, and reduce it all to genes and what serves their survival. But in spite of this microbiological case, the story telling remains the same.



How the Elephant Got its Trunk

Consider the incest taboo. It's a universal constant among humanity. Grow up with partners of the opposite sex, whether kin or not, and sexual maturity will bring a startling indifference to them. The universal experience of growing up immature in the company of kith and kin was bound to a hypothetical 'imprinting mechanism' that like phlogiston explained the incest aversion in all its forms. Of course, the fact that such a specific imprinting mechanism has never been discovered in the human

brain, or that such a mechanism provided only post hoc predictions didn't matter. What *did* matter was that the evolutionary story seemed so compelling. After all, since mating with kin would likely result in children with two heads and twelve toes, evolution in its blind wisdom would surely see to it that we have some inborn mechanism to prevent such non adaptive horrors. Certainly Pinker bought into this line, and the 'just so' story of why natural selection had to build an imprinting mechanism was accepted by him as well as other evolutionary psychologists as bona fide evidence that one existed. That is, the 'why' such a mechanism must be impelled an acceptance of 'how' it must be.

Of course, Pinker did not count on a modern day Lavoisier, nor would he, since the grey congealed pudding that makes up our brains is really not grist for a book on how the mind works. The integration of neuroscience and learning theory is typically avoided by evolutionary psychologists, and particularly avoided by Pinker. But that's where we find our explanation, as simply and elegantly as Lavoisier's theory of combustion, requiring but a breath of fresh air both figuratively and literally. And so, what is our solution? Perhaps the answer to why we stop short of kissing our sister has to do with stopping short, at a stop sign.

Blocking

Consider how we learn the rules of the road. A red light signifies that traffic must stop, and that other intersecting lanes will move. But what would happen if an equally reliable purple light began after a few seconds to shine above the red light. Would we pay attention to this equally reliable indicator to stop, and would we do so if approaching an intersection in the future, when only a purple light shines before us?



Life is full of traffic signals

Surprisingly, no. The stimulus salience of the purple light would be effectively coopted or 'blocked' by the red light, even though logically it should suggest the same response, namely a foot on the brakes.

The concept of 'blocking' is well established in learning theory, and its neurological correlates have been extensively traced. Its evolutionary significance is obvious, namely, the need to effectively parse the stimuli in the world from the important and novel from the important yet merely redundant. A red light predicts traffic flow, and there is no need to learn to learn the reliability of a different light if the information it conveys denotes no new information. Break the rule and we would be overwhelmed with repetitive associations that only serve to command precious computational space.

Unfortunately, nature's designs do not account for changes in the order of the world. Take away all red lights and leave the purple, and one will

have to 'relearn' (and likely the hard way!) the importance of purple lights. Keep the red light and concurrently introduce a green, and we will hesitate as well. The fact that important associations cannot be made if they denote redundant rather than irrelevant information is crucial to understanding many behavioral anomalies that we are too quick to adduce to specialized instinctive causes. More pointedly, why explain that behavior as the result of a specialized neural mechanism when a general purpose mechanics will do? Spend your early years with a relative or friend of the opposite sex, and you will inadvertently learn to associate their appearance with nonsexual intentions, enough ironically to block the sexual desire that comes with maturity. In other words, familiarity breeds not contempt, but apathy! To attribute an evolutionary tale to an inferred mechanism designed to fit the tale is like attributing walking to the store to the evolutionary pressure to pick a dozen eggs when merely the need to be able to walk will do. A specific trait compacted and expressed like a software code is like phlogiston, irrefutable because is unprovable; a sterile solution when a more mundane and eminently provable alternative is all that is necessary. The solution, as Lavoiser would attest involves merely coming up for and with, air. (Rather than coming up with a tale, as Pinker does, which is nothing but hot air!).

Indecent Exposure

A seldom discussed fact is that thousands upon thousands of American children are daily exposed to sex acts, violence, and an environment where dogs eat dog and anything else they can find. Moreover, these children are subject to dangerous and overbearing child labor practices that involve the unsupervised use of heavy machinery, and long and

uncompensated hours in harsh environmental conditions. For the modern generation, we tend to think that such a life style would produce a coarsened generation who would eschew Disneyfied values for a brutish Darwinian life, but for our immediate ancestors, this was just the environment to nurture Jeffersonian democrats. That's the family farm for you, a hell hole or a forge of virtue, depending upon your point of view.



The world is a bloody minded and tough place, and for the countless generations which preceded the modern age, you had to live with it, and became a better person *because of* and not in spite of it. You had in other words, to learn to fend *and think* for yourself. Ultimately, it wasn't the hardship or the horror, but the freedom that comes with responsibility.

Which brings us of course to the perennial concern about children accessing the wrong type of knowledge from text to pictures, whether it be in the library or on the internet. The fact is, it is not bad experience but bad ideas that coarsen us, and a free society must assume that people will have as much resilience as they have brains, and in time will sort it all out. Indeed, a nanny state that denies the experiences that are part of being

alive also denies the ability to learn from them. Our ancestors certainly did this in spite of the everyday brutality of life, and we can too.

Information Overload

“Why are you fearful of the whole ocean swallowing you, when in fact you can drown in a cup of water.” Epictetus, 110 A. D. ^{bb}

We often moan that there’s not enough time in the day because there’s too much to do, but now the common complaint is that it’s because you’re doing too much. Information overload is the bugbear here, but it has been the bugbear since our ancestors were bugged by bears. Humankind has always been faced with more information than it can handle, but we learned to handle it by filtering. Like a chess master pondering the numberless moves that can sequentially secure checkmate, humans parse between information that is necessary, optional, or redundant. But they are also sensitive to novel information as well, and this ingredient can change the behavioral calculus in ways that make it impossible for us to out good information from bad.

Consider if you would, your uncle Charlie. It’s 1965, and living as he is in a faraway town, he’s always available to you, and is merely a phone call away. Unfortunately, long distance phone calls back then set you back twenty five cents a minute, so when you were calling Uncle Charlie, it was sure to be about something important. Although infinite information about Uncle Charlie was available, the transaction cost of obtaining that information insured that the information you got from your uncle had a high predicted value, usefulness, or utility.



Social Networking Device, circa 1965

Now it's 2010, and Uncle Charley is still around, along with his infinite experiences that he was always willing to share. The pay phone is long gone now, and Uncle Charley is now plugged into the entire electromagnetic spectrum. And you can access his every move and every thought through myriad devices and services that provide you Uncle Charley, all the time. So whether it is Twitter, Facebook, Foursquare, instant message, email, or Skype accessed through your iPhone, iPad, laptop, or even future permitting, cranial implant, Uncle Charley is no more than an eye blink away.

More important, Uncle Charley is now 'free', and you can access him with minimal cost or fuss. So even though the value of accessing Uncle Charley from moment to moment is near zero, we still end up accessing Uncle Charley, a lot. In fact, we are 'overloaded' with Uncle Charley as well as infinite minutiae of minimal utility but high urgency. In fact, as in Epictetus' maxim, we find oceans of information in a few ounces of water but historically have not been drowned in information because access to

information comes at a cost. Now as the cost approaches zero, attend we must, and end up drowning in a cup.

When the cost of information trends to zero, so does its marginal or incremental utility. However, the *affective* value of novel information stays low but constant, and when the threshold is passed we end up valuing information not because it is valuable, but because it is new. Thus when information is dear, we value it because of its utility, but when it is cheap we value it because it is novel.

But unlike rational goods, novel goods cannot be easily parsed or handled according to rules, hence we become 'overloaded' with them, and that is a problem even a computer can't help us with.

Meet Joe Green

It was twenty five years ago, and I was attending my first opera, Verdi's masterpiece 'La Traviata'. Sitting amidst a finely attired and coiffed audience, my reaction was swift. Mouth agape, I thought. What the heck is this?

It sounded like Italian circus music, although of the finest quality. And they were all singing, no screaming in Italian! What were they all jabbering about? What was the point if you couldn't understand their point. They could all be screaming multiplication tables for all I knew. So I exited stage right in a manner of speaking, hoping to catch at home the latest rerun of Star Trek.

Naturally, of course, this was the reaction of a cultural barbarian, to which I have repented with endless and appreciative visits to the opera. Yet, looking back at my first operatic experience, I actually did have a point.

Why indeed sing in Italian if the audience grammatically picks up nothing?



Joe Green

In Hans Christian Anderson's fairy tale, 'The Emperor's New Clothes', the Emperor paraded around town, quite naked of course, but clad in the finest invisible and sheer attire, so sheer in fact that it was weightless. The people applauded, except for a little boy, who exclaimed that the emperor had no clothes. Although the audience and the emperor recognized at once the error of their ways, I'm not so sure if honest candor works so well in real life.

You see, in spite of my fondness for opera, there's still no real reason to sing in a native language otherwise incomprehensible to the audience. Purists may protest that singing in English ignores the natural purity and poetry of the original language, an argument that holds water I suppose if you think that singing in German sounds wonderful and that Shakespeare would also sound good with an Italian accent. Anyways, I don't buy it. It's tradition really, habit, the fact that doing things one way for a long

time confers some logical inevitability to doing it that same way forever. Like sitting on a favorite chair, taking the same route to work, or not eating pizza for breakfast, old habits die hard, and we will tend to justify them emotionally even if we cannot justify them logically. For opera, the purists squawked when subtitles were finally added below the action on stage, but settled down as the new habit of actually following the plot kicked in. I don't know if opera will ever take the more radical step of singing in the accessible mother tongue, any more than we will ever think of Giuseppe Verdi in his proper English translation, Joe Green. But it's a thought.

Nick of Time

Arguably, the most exciting and interesting part of a movie is when the protagonist disarms the bomb, missile, trap, etc. just in the nick of time. Similarly, we are just as captivated when a tied game in sport is extended for an extra inning, round, hole, etc., where one mistep also means 'sudden death', but of the metaphorical variety.

But did we ever stop to think that if all these folks just had an extra minute or two to save the world or the game, how much better it would be for everybody? It certainly would make for a less fretful moment, but we all know it would be boring as hell.



That's motivation for ya. We just can't get up for the challenge until there really *is* a challenge. Unwittingly, that's perhaps the greatest argument not for achievement, but for procrastination. After all, when you can save the world or the ball game with time to spare, why not make it exciting and heroic by making a certain event into something a bit chancy? So when you make it to the office, prepare your tax return, or catch the plane with a minute to spare, you're not some lazy fart, but are Tom Cruise in *Mission Impossible*.

So when we are exalting our heroes, we are really celebrating their ability to procrastinate with finesse and style. After all, they wouldn't be heroes otherwise.

Odysseus visits the land of Google

Nine days after our departure from Troy my men and I found ourselves in a strange land and miles from our original course. In order to learn a bit more about this alien place, I sent three of my bravest soldiers on a scouting mission. Unfortunately they learned a lot more than I had counted on. On their expedition, my men found themselves among natives of our temporary habitat.

Like any good host, these natives introduced my men to one of their favorite appetizers: the lotus. A single taste of this native fruit made my soldiers forget everything they had ever known; where they were from, where they were going, everything. Although many of my other men would have enjoyed this easy way of living at this point, I decided I wouldn't give them the chance to choose it. For their own good, of course. –Homer's Odyssey

Odysseus' problem raises an eternal philosophical question. If given the choice, would we live out our lives in pleasure that serves no purpose save the maintenance of our being in a mindless stasis, or is there something more? In other words, does eating from the tree of knowledge mean you have to kick yourself out of Eden? After all, Odysseus's Eden, like any paradise may be conducive to knowledge, but not in putting knowledge to use. Indeed, we are pained if our actions have no resonance, or echo in our private eternity. When information is free, when everything is 'found' for us, even the spur of novelty departs, and that is boring as hell, which is ironically the point.



A nice place to visit

Perhaps Odysseus would have foretold a similar fate for this poor character is another 'Twilight Zone' teleplay (by Charles Beaumont) entitled befittingly, 'A nice place to visit.' A two bit burglar is killed after robbing a jewelry store and shooting a cop and a night watchman. He is greeted in the afterlife by a mysterious fellow named Pip who promises him anything he wishes. So everything is made available to him, from women to material comforts to winning, constantly and predictably at anything he chooses. Predictably, as is the case in this special place, he becomes bored, and pleads with Pip to be sent to the other place; to which Pip responds laughing, "you *are* in the other place".

OF MICE AND MEN

They are perfect, willing subjects. Though not particularly bright, in fact they are bird brained. They are willing accomplices to those brainier fellows who saw a sort of wisdom in their witlessness. In fact this stupidity was a virtue, a state of mindlessness that bared the rudiments of mind, and laid the foundations for a new way of thinking about how organisms, and in particular, people behave. But who were these harbingers of simple wisdom, of psychological truths?

Feathered or furry, and conveniently tiny, these partners in scientific progress were the mouse and the pigeon, the fabled laboratory animal. They earned their keep by running in mazes, pressing levers, pecking at lighted buttons, and all for a bit of food, or in worse situations, to escape an electric shock. It was a literal rat race, a microcosm and abstraction of human concerns. Strange stuff indeed upon which to build a science.

Yet indeed that was the case. Mazes and levers and electric shocks represent problems or tasks to these little creatures. The manner that they worked these problems out, or responded to these tasks is important stuff, 'data', and data is the grist for journal articles, complex theorizing, and even a little understanding about how and why we behave.

And what of this newfound wisdom, this fresh insight into the mind of man? Well, it was all unremarkable knowledge, a mundane and almost too simple insight. And that was the remarkable thing. Put a mouse in a box, have him press a bar for food, and like a good laborer, he'll do it, to a point. If he has to press too many times, and for a little bit of food, he'll balk at the task, take time outs, get frustrated, and when he's off the job, will tend to beat up on his mate, and abuse substances, like cheese. The daily grind would become inescapable, and literally shocking if the little fellow was put away in a little box, and jolted with electricity if he tried to escape. He would understandably become depressed, helpless, and even if he were removed to a safer place, he would remain inert and depressed. He would have become helpless.

But just as you can make a mouse into the semblance of a harried office worker or a depressed ghetto dweller, you can also make him manic, supercharged, a real mouse about town. Simply rig up the little lever with the variable pay off of a slot machine, and soon the little bugger will be merrily and madly pressing the level as if it were a one-armed bandit. The mouse will be happy and satisfied, and will not abuse his mate, or be tempted to eat the children.

And so it goes, modest experiments with little animals producing shadowy outlines of human traits. And what was the key to these wildly differing patterns of behavior? Well, it can't be willing, thinking, or existential angst, and Freudian motives won't work either. When you're

dealing with what are essentially a bunch of mouse or bird brains, you have to settle on a simple mechanics.

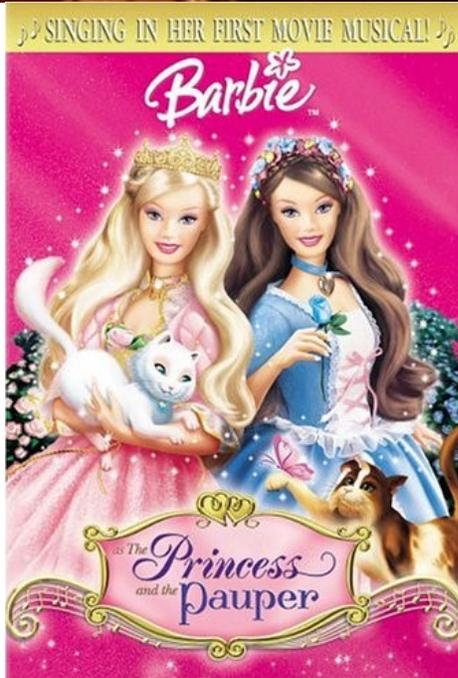
With a simpler mechanics, the outside causes which set them in motion become simpler too. The behavior correlated with programs or schedules of reward or 'reinforcement', patterns of information which race through the animal's perception like a computer program races through the central processing unit of a computer. A mouse, like a tiny computer, accessible and controllable by an abstract dance between the mouse and his world. The experimenter is the partner in this dance, who choreographs the motions of his little partner by designing these schedules of reinforcement. So how is behavior predicted and controlled? The scientist divines not tea leaves or the stars, but schedules. And so the behavior of these little animals is reduced to the piano roll of schedules, patterns of information that are arranged just so, a simple and elegant hypothesis borne out by equally simple facts.

Now there is a long way between the mind of man and the mind of a mouse, yet man can be more than a little enlightened by the modest truths that these little creature convey to us. In an age when human motivations are elevated further and further into a foggy cloud of drives, needs, and hidden motives, its nice to see that there may be simple and more elegant reasons for our behavior. Perhaps it is hubris, a fatal immodesty which drives us to over complicate and ultimately obfuscate our understanding as to what ultimately makes men move. Maybe the ultimate question we must put to ourselves is not how like a god, but how like a mouse.

Mozart on the Barbie

I just finished watching with my little daughter the latest computer graphic masterpiece of the modern cinema 'The Princess and the Pauper', starring 'Barbie'. This insipid plastic doll, which bears an uncanny resemblance to Paris Hilton, has thanks to modern technology supplanted real life actresses, though I wince imagining Hillary Duff in the role. This movie was more than a Barbie play, it was a Barbie musical. Fetching music, if of course you like musical tapwater. Nonetheless, it's stuff for the ages, between the ages four and eight that is.

A ridiculous legacy perhaps to be known as a composer for such cartoonish tripe, but that's par for the course when genius has to be married with other inspirations pulled from the bottom drawer. Discounting whether Barbie music ever could aspire to greatness, it is a truism that works of genius generally serve humble or vulgar ends. In other words, without a view to an imminent or even distant payday, creativity most assuredly will *not* find a way.



Mozart composing Eine Kleine Barbiemusick

A persistent illusion among psychologists is that creation needs motives that well up pure and sparkling from within, like spring water. Get rid of all those bad extrinsic motivators (i.e., the fast buck), and the Mozart, Shakespeare, or Michelangelo within us will break free. Problem is, Mozart generally composed on commission, Shakespeare wrote for a fickle, women ogling, nut cracking audience that paid the bills, and Michelangelo was not in the ceiling painting business until the Pope made the call. The fact is, genius needs vulgar motives to survive. The trick is to get the vulgar masses to be interested enough to demand a higher standard of excellence in the stuff they buy .

But what's excellence but in the eye of the beholder? As a member of the vulgar masses who inadvertently voted for the Barbie operetta, perhaps I've given an unwitting vote for mediocrity, but not in the eyes of my four year old daughter, where Barbie is the Renaissance personified. To which I must admit, she is correct.

On Napoleon and Metaphor

A case may be made that histories of the world, or what we have made of the world, belong in the proverbial attic, or not even there. What remains for our view of the complete accounting of the past are merely legacies that exist as tales told to inform through allegory or example. And what does Napoleon teach us about the dynamics and foibles of human nature, and how it plays out on a continental stage? If told well, at the very least it is all quite entertaining, and can be as dramatic and telling as a play by Shakespeare. But the minutiae of Napoleon's past are not one's concern because they have no import to our concerns. However, summarize and embellish them with metaphor, and they become the stuff of high drama, and sometimes will bear lessons that are worth repeating. So by remembering the garish outlines of the past, it will help us prevent

repeating its mistakes, but it is not Napoleon we need remember but the maxims we learn from his history.

History of course entails a summary and account of human behavior from the soft focus of the eddies and currents of metaphors writ large. Countries and individuals are charged with metaphorical impulses, desires, and needs that cause matter and people to well up like thunder heads. Names for nationalistic, religious, and political movements pin down the genus of our behavior as if a collective point of view was as distinguishable as the wings and body of a butterfly fixed by a needle. But the human imagination embodies the rules it makes for its history, and art, literature and philosophy paint equally vivid pictures of the metaphorical forces that drive collective and individual minds. But we don't describe behavior through broad brush strokes that barely hint at the greater structure beneath. Like Chinese boxes or a Russian doll, smaller metaphors fit into a larger and infinite regression. To know Napoleon is not to know his victories, but his history, his mind, and if possible, the very events that shaped it. Each one fits into the other. The purpose of course is harmony, the smaller must fit into the larger, and the larger must suggest the outlines of the smaller. If not, there is no harmony, and the puzzle will not fit. Regress has its own laws, its own discipline. To know Napoleon is to know what he had for breakfast. On that fateful day at Waterloo two hundred years ago, it was perhaps a spoiled meal that made for Napoleon's indigestion that like the proverbial want of a nail lost an empire. We can accept ill fitting metaphors because our knowledge is fuzzy, and we can only approximate the myriad events that are nested within the large scale events that have turned our world.

On the planet Nintendo: A Star Trek Fantasy

It was a very special Star Trek.

Our fearless crew was exploring the planet Nintendo, a place where the inhabitants, long ago lost in a world of ever enhanced video games, succeeded in creating virtual worlds wherein just a wish made reality, but of a virtual sort of course. Naturally the Nintendoites evolved really big brains to house their virtual reality powers, but along the way they lost track of reality, and in turn lost track of really good subject matter to base their mind games.

So, while the star ship Enterprise away team was out on the planet surface scouting out new alien flora and fauna, the Nintendoites kidnapped Captain Pike (we're talking very early Star Trek here), put him in a glass cage, and proceeded to act out Pike's own personal adventures, which thankfully had themselves a Nintendo ring to them. Naturally, Captain Pike soon became wise to the Nintendoites, and rebelled against watching reruns of his dreams. And so the Nintendoites threw up their hands, and released the good Captain to his crew. During this time, Captain Pike found a really hot girl friend, captured sometime earlier by the aliens, and asked that she be released as well. She was quite oddly resistant to this great offer, and with a nod the Nintendoites revealed that they had performed a mental boob job on her, and her real appearance was revealed as rather unappetizing to say the least, something like a cross between a human and a turnip.

The Nintendoites confessed that when her spaceship crash landed on their planet sometime earlier, they had no idea how to put her crumpled body back together again, so they gave it their best shot. Besides, she still had

her great personality, even though her face looked like mashed potatoes. Naturally, the captain immediately excused himself, saying he had planets to explore and such, and he and his intrepid crew blasted off, and with obvious relief.

There is a happy ending to this story of course, as shortly thereafter Captain Pike fell into a galactic cheese shredder, and reassembled, looked like a giant crouton. But thanks to intervention by Mr. Spock and Captain Kirk, Captain Crouton was returned to Planet Nintendo to be reunited with Ms. Turnip to spend their remain salad days in idyllic fantasy, obliged of course by the eager and drooling aliens of Nintendo.

There's a moral somewhere in this story, so here it is. As we Americans sink further into our own Nintendo fantasy worlds, we forget how the world and other people are put together. The further away they are the more they resemble crosses between real people and assorted vegetables (well at least on Fox news). We have some experience with this, particularly with a strange human hybrid of man and cheese called the French, but lately it's becoming worse, as Arabs, Chinese, Mexicans, and Canadians are falling into the human cusinart. And how will it eventually end? Perhaps eventually we will all evolve really big brains, like Nintendoites, or end up as human croutons. Or maybe it will all be like Star Trek where humans and aliens live happily together, but that I fear is the biggest fantasy of all.

My Russia Trip: Take a Number

I was in Russia the other day, well a lot of days ago. It was July, 2003 to be exact. Just visiting my wife's folks. Since my wife is from Russia, it didn't seem at the time that I would be visiting Russian to see the inlaws any time soon.

I was wrong.

You don't take the mini-van to this place, you take the train, and from Moscow you stay in the tiny cabin of the sleeping car for TWO DAYS straight. If Napoleon's army had taken the train to Moscow, I am sure his fate would have been the same, except his troops would have frozen to death in the dining car. Anyways, my wife's home town is called Krasnoturinsk, a dilapidated little town that looks like Aspen, Colorado would look like if it mainly catered to Ukrainian migrant tomato pickers. Krasnoturninsk is easy to find. Just picture yourself in nowhere. Now put yourself in the middle of it. See, easy! Krasnoturinskians spend a lot of their time idling along, waiting, or it's off to the outskirts of town so they can plant potatoes, squash, berries, or whatever, and then sit back and watch them sprout. Of course, a plentiful supply of vodka helps you idle better, which I can attest to personally.

Now, getting about in this idyllic (or should I say idle-ick) country should be a priority, after all I wanted to spread my boredom about equitably. But no. You see, a passport and visa are not enough to give you the right to trot about the country. My passport needed another stamp, sort of a 'park hopper' pass (like you get in Disneyworld). So my wife and I trotted to a non descript building (all buildings here are non descript), housing the local travel agency. Breezing through travel brochures for excursions to the Black Sea, Greece, and other places, I noted that there were none for the U.S. There's a simple reason for this, namely the American bureaucratic opinion that America is such a swell place, anybody traveling from a less than first world country will be tempted to stay, well, forever. So no passports for the local folk unless they would leave behind as a virtual hostage a multi-million dollar bank account and pregnant wife.

So as I figure, the Russians returned the favor by letting you in, but still

requiring the locals to invite you to visit. My passport was soon on its merry way to the nearby city of Ekaterinburg, and expedited as we requested, it would only take I was assured four weeks or so to get stamped, just in time for me to take the train out of this place. But I digress.

It was the agony associated with my wife's passport that raised my keen psychological eye. As a lady with a schizophrenic identity, namely Russian and American citizenship, she naturally needed her passport fixed as well. So that meant a trip to the notary and a few other bureaucratic functionaries. Picture a spare waiting room, about 15 meters square, with about twenty or so people milling about. Every thirty minutes, the door would open, a voice would call, and a flurry of fingers would point, right and left. Who was next? Who knows? Anyways, what struck me was that the Russians had not, in the renaissance of their freedom, invented that great American time saver: taking a number. We couldn't take a number, couldn't get our name put down in a queue. We just had to wait. Naturally, after five hours, we were the last one's to be called, but at that moment we were told the office would be closed, and to come back another day.

In experimental psychology, if a mouse, rat, or monkey is put in a position where it can't escape from a shock, it learns to be helpless, and won't respond to helpful cues to escape when even the gates of the cage are drawn down. In seventy years, an entire nation learned that it couldn't escape, and therefore couldn't attend to the simple cues, or for that matter provide for the simple cues, that would allow them to escape. So we were all trapped in that little room, for want of a taking simple number. If I was to write a lesson from this experience, perhaps critical thinking is not the real problem, but learning to *attend* to the problem to begin with. Here, no one attended to the problem, so they suffered silently in the face of it, as if waiting in life was as inevitable as death and taxes. In America, our

problem is the opposite, as we are so keen on solving problems, we must continually invent new ones to solve. Perhaps there is higher lesson to this, but I'll take a number and think about it another time.

Perverse Incentives

"I know that most men, including those at ease with problems of the greatest complexity, can seldom accept even the simplest and most obvious truth if it be such as would oblige them to admit the falsity of conclusions which they have delighted in explaining to colleagues, which they have proudly taught to others, and which they have woven, thread by thread, into the fabric of their lives." Leo Tolstoy

"It is difficult to get a man to understand something when his salary depends upon him not understanding it." Upton Sinclair.

In Hans Christian Anderson's fairy tale 'The Emperor's New Clothes', a vain emperor was persuaded by two con men to purchase the most exquisite and sheer clothing made of fabric that was not only fit for a king, but could only be seen by those fit for their position or who were not 'hopelessly stupid'. The emperor as well as his ministers of course could not see the new raiment, and in fear of their positions they simply affirmed with fake enthusiasm the beauty of the emperor's new clothes. So when the emperor and his retinue made a grand procession to display his sartorial grandeur, the emperor beamed, his retainers smiled, and the audience applauded. Not to do so of course would be, well, stupid. The procession went swimmingly until a child cried out: "The emperor has no clothes", at which the crowd laughed, the courtiers grimaced, and the emperor, trying to salvage his dignity, haughtily marched on.

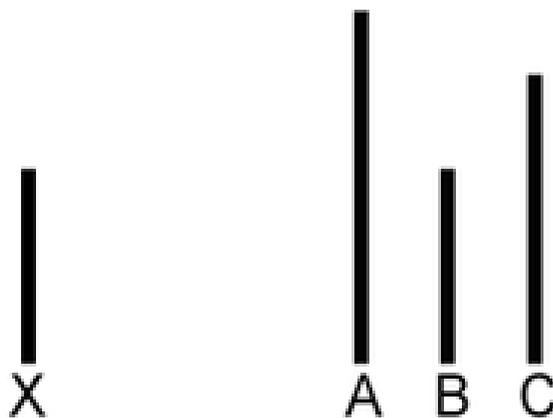
The emperor's new clothes were the product of a tailor's effort, and to the child only seeing was believing. But for adult types, believing can also occur in spite of our eyes, as when we recognize causes that are obscure or special. In Anderson's story, the tailors were earnest and persuasive sorts. They had to be right, somehow, in spite of our eyes. After all, to deny their apparent industry and integrity would look stupid. Belief occurred not because of the 'dependent measure' of the tailor's product, which was nowhere to be seen, but from the 'independent' measure of two tailors and the assumed validity of their mysterious art.



Sometimes, it takes a bit of naiveté to see the naiveté in others

The lessons of this story are easy to find. Look at any medium, and you'll find an advertiser who wants you buy into their line. If your friends,

family, and assorted 'experts' agree, and even if personal experience doesn't seem in line, the line becomes a 'trend' line, and we all like lemmings jump aboard, regardless of our vision of the cliff below. From the tulip craze in Holland in 17th century to contemporary manias for real estate to gold, bubbles are a proxy for wisdom, as money merely sloshes from one safe haven to another rather than derives from a growing store of value. Of course, everyone knows that the internet is an unqualified boon, and in spite of our own misgivings, this universal opinion is a substitute for a good explanation that demonstrates that we really are getting the short end of the stick. But delusions like this are not new, even if we literally *are* getting the short end of a stick.



The Asch Conformity Experiment

Asch Conformity Experiment: A classic social psychology experiment that found that when a subject is given two lines of unequal length and learns that his peers think the longer line is shorter, the subject will bend to the will of the majority, particularly if he is alone in the minority. This experiment thus explains why

people believe somebody else's line, from religion to politics, since millions of true believers can't be wrong.

For example, look at line A, and then compare to the other lines. It should be a simple matter to conclude that line A is bigger than the others, unless you are in a room with a bunch of folks who beg to differ. Although you remain un-persuaded, you go with the flow, and vote along with the mob, and you will continue to do so until one person in the group also begs to differ, which fortifies your resolution, and up to now suppressed common sense.

Of course, if you'd take a moment to think of a better explanation of the matter than a group of people taking leave of their senses, you may hypothesize a differed incentive, namely, that they are in it to con you. That is in essence the classic Asch conformity experiment. *In the basic Asch paradigm^{cc}, the participants — the real subjects and the confederates — were all seated in a classroom. They were asked a variety of questions about the lines such as how long is A, compare the length of A to an everyday object, which line was longer than the other, which lines were the same length, etc. The group was told to announce their answers to each question out loud. The confederates always provided their answers before the study participant, and always gave the same answer as each other. They answered a few questions correctly but eventually began providing incorrect responses.*

In a control group, with no pressure to conform to an erroneous view, only one subject out of 35 never gave an incorrect answer. Solomon Asch hypothesized that the majority of people would not conform to something obviously wrong; however, when surrounded by individuals all voicing an incorrect answer, participants provided incorrect responses on a high proportion of the questions (32%). Seventy-five percent of the participants gave an incorrect answer to at least one question.

In the Asch conformity experiment, perceptions did not lie, although the perception of what response was necessary *was* a lie. The subject has no explanation for the behavior of his peers, but relented to their pressure because as a rule of thumb, his peers obviously knew best. But what if the lines were concealed behind separate curtains, never to be revealed? If the crowd assuredly pointed to one of the curtains, we would likely follow as a matter of faith. And indeed that is what having a faith is, a heuristic conclusion that your trusted peers can't be wrong. Extend this principle to religious or political faiths, and one notes the persuasive power of decisions that cannot be explained.

When rules of thumb derive not from explanation but from mere correlation (e.g., my friends repeatedly do not steer me wrong.), you are using inductive principles. These principles can steer you right, or as the Asch experiment demonstrates, badly wrong. Similarly, why we use the internet is driven by inductive principles that without explanation lead you to assume that the choices of your peers are right, and fail to question if they have an ulterior motive. And the results are invariably that we are left with the short end of the stick.

Plato's Garbage Pile

The internet is a distraction medium par excellence, as it can sidetrack you to areas that scarcely reflect your main interests at hand. But even if we keep our focus on the straight and narrow, in lieu of making our attention roam wide, the internet can make our attention long. This may represent the most insidious distraction of all. Defined as a *transformational distraction*, our engagement with information may extend beyond the usefulness *of* that information. This is particularly the case with internet

use, as an article on a topic is often nested with links and sidebars that contain other similar articles on the same topic. As we move from one article to the other, the marginal usefulness of each article declines, and the productive use of our time dramatically declines as we dwell on not on a theme, but variations *of* a theme.

For example, consider a shopper going to Wal-Mart in search of a couple of tomatoes. Upon quickly finding his perfect, ripe red veggies (fruit actually), his attention is drawn to the other tomatoes in the aisle that are a bit overripe. Soon his attention moves again to a row of spoiled tomatoes, and then finally to a bushel of rotten tomatoes. He becomes eventually up to his ears in tomatoes, entranced not so much by their ripeness but by the novelty of their rottenness.

Now consider an individual who wants to go out to the movies. Wanting to note the critical opinion on a specific film, he goes to the website 'Rotten Tomatoes'. The site, which contains scores of reviews for individual films, gives him fresh information on the quality of the film. But other reviews of the site's page remain compelling, even if the information is redundant and stale. But our information shopper persists, accessing even more reviews as the quality of the information becomes progressively more stale and 'rotten'.

In hindsight, both shoppers would have been better off searching in a smaller venue such as a farmer's market or local newspaper. They would have gotten good tomatoes and good movie reviews, and not have wasted time with the diminishing returns of looking at fruit or film reviews that have less and less useful knowledge to give. When we apply the moral of this story to the internet, we note that the internet is super in finding important things that with slight variations endlessly repeat themselves. We hook on to the variation, but forget the fact that the information is redundant, and is likely as stale as a three week old tomato.



Plato's Garbage Pile

So if you are looking about facts about the economy, a Mideast war, a football game, or whatever, you will find a pile of facts that have as much enduring value as a bushel or rotten tomatoes. You are what you eat, and you are also what you learn. And if you end up consuming a lot of redundant information only to learn scarcely nothing more for your trouble, you've just filled up on virtual garbage.

Procrastination and the spell of danger

Procrastination: the abiding problem of getting things done in time or at all, which will soon be cured by our leading psychologists as soon as they get around to it.

When we go to the movies, it's often in the nick of time before the feature starts. And when the feature does start, we take pleasure and excitement in watching folks do things once again in the nick of time. Consider the proverbial time bomb. It is a metaphor for plot lines like getting the girl, solving the crime, averting the fire, saving the planet, and of course defusing the bomb when there is literally no time to spare. Miss the deadline and there will be a proverbial or actual explosion that will render the hero and all the good things he stands for into a pile of dust. That's what makes drama so dramatic, the fact that the outcome is always uncertain until a resolution comes in the nick of time. Identifying with our hero in the cinema means putting ourselves in his place, and this cinematic empathy can drive us to tears, horror, disgust, or delight, but underscoring it all is a need for our undivided attention. The easiest way to do that is to literally wait until the last minute, or preferably, the last second. But that of course is courting danger, and danger is something that we presumably are instinctively geared to avoid or flee through the intervention of a 'hard wired' stress response, with the result that danger would be something we would continually want to avoid. But we don't, and that's the rub. The fact that we wait until the last minute to get things done means that we are actively putting ourselves into stressful or near stressful situations that we by all accounts should wish to avoid. But how can this be? Like a moth to the flame we are at once attracted and repelled by danger, but the problem and irony is that we couldn't be motivated to do things otherwise. Danger increases risk, and risk embodies the prospect of uncertainty, and it is precisely this fact that makes us

attentively aroused and more attuned to the task at hand. But with it, we are also incited to stay the course of *being* uncertain. That is the property of the neuro-modulator dopamine, which primes us to be alert and imparts incentive value to moment to moment behavior. But because dopamine only increases the value of momentary behavior, it can act at cross purposes to our long term interests. Hence we often procrastinate *to be* attentive, a state of mind that is dependent upon the uncertainty of the moment but ignorant of the long term prospects of behavior irrespective of their danger.



Motivation is da bomb!

But what is procrastination? Simple definitions of procrastination mean to postpone activities until another time. Of course, that by definition covers everything you postpone, whether it's logical or not. So if to order our daily schedule means to do one thing in deference or postponement of another, that means that our whole life is spend procrastinating, which is absurd. A better definition is provided by the Oxford Dictionary, which holds that "*Procrastination is a postponement, often with the sense of deferring though indecision, when early action would have been preferable,*" or as "*deferring action, especially without good reason.*"^{dd} The concept that procrastination is

an inherently unreasonable thing has been echoed by many pundits^{ee ff gg}^{hh}, who concur that procrastination is the irrational delay of behavior.

At root however this definition is nonsense, for even irrational behavior must have a reason to be. It's only when behavior doesn't fit our prized model that we curse the agent rather than the explanation, but the faulty explanation always loses. Consider the behavior of the solar system. The fact that it didn't conform to the model that put the earth in the center of the universe didn't make the planetary motions irrational, and even faulting the God for bad design principles couldn't escape from the fact that the world worked in mysterious but not irrational ways. As creatures who embody the natural world, the conclusion is the same. Humans act in mysterious but not quite irrational ways, and behavior must serve reasons both obvious and subtle, as there is nothing nutty under the sun. The point therefore is not to decry the unreasonableness of procrastination, but investigating why for us common folks procrastination is often not an unreasonable but a necessary and rational thing.

Consider the fact that we don't work when we are sleepy, hungry, or are under the sun, and generally wait until a time when we are rested, sated, or in the cool of the evening. We do this because at a later time we can work faster, more comfortably, and with more alertness and attention to our job. In these cases, 'procrastination' is rather a justifiable delay. Procrastination can also be a reasonable thing if we consciously or non-consciously postpone an action in order to inject an element of risk into behavior. Since risk increases dopamine release that corresponds with positive affect and attentive alertness, procrastination can actually increase the effectiveness of behavior. In other words, procrastination is a reasonable thing if it represents the non conscious manipulation of affect to *increase* effectiveness, whereas procrastination due to distraction or the apprehension of pain (e.g. putting off a dental appointment) simply reduces effectiveness. But both are reasonable in their own way, as

procrastination may serve both approach and avoidance. Ultimately, doing things effectively means doing things *affectively*, and that often means acting just in time. The non-reasonableness of behavior is an aspect of everything we do because motivation requires activation, and this means affect. In other words, to be effective we must be affective, and affect never falls within 'good reason' unless there is good reason to manipulate affect. Ultimately, procrastination implies irrationality, but irrationality occurs when we ignore reasonable causes, and when affect is left out of the picture of human behavior we are left confused and needful of a title to describe how timeliness of behavior cannot be predicted by the reasonableness of behavior. Thus procrastination is not an artifact of behavior, but of our ignorance of how motivation works.

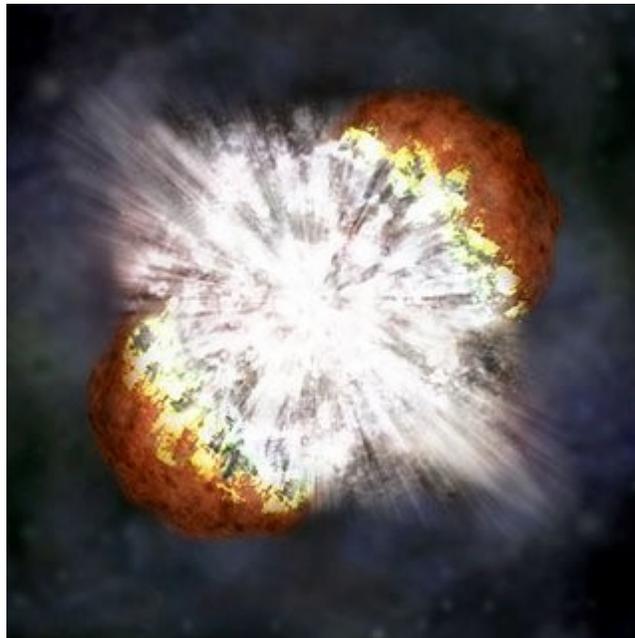
Psychology goes Nova

Mark Twain once remarked that the United States is special because its people possess the one true faith, several hundred of them. Likewise, for the social sciences, the United States is special because its academics possess the one true explanation, numbering also in the hundreds.

Of course, practical people that we are, we have the one true answer to this babel of opinion. We ignore it, unless of course it proves useful. If the explanation proves vicariously useful, we have superstition, and give some credence to the predictive power of black cats, the astrological significance of the movement of planets, and of saying lots of prayers to St. Jude. If its practically useful, it becomes common sense, and has no author.

But for psychologists and their pet schools of thought, usefulness is neither practical or vicarious, it is *precarious*. In other words, if you are

psychologist with a Freudian, behaviorist, or some other point of view, its predictions sound just swell, until of course they fail to test out. It is then that like a hot gaseous star that has burned off its fuel (or for a school of psychology, its credibility), it will collapse upon itself and explode, leaving a white dwarf that represents a puny beacon signaling the star's former ethereal greatness. And this is exactly what we have for once influential (transactional analysis anyone?) psychological points of view that faintly glimmer in the minds of a few remnant true believers.



Evolutionary Psychology goes Boom!

This astronomical fact serves as a swell metaphor for psychology and the invariable schools of thought from time to time that swell up to give us 'the answer', describing human behavior in all its cantankerousness. From psychoanalysis to behaviorism and as of late, dubious schools of thought such as evolutionary psychology and relational frame theory, they are

puffed up with hot gas that invariably blows up under the weight of its useless and contrary data.

Which brings us to pop psychology, which compared to hi-falutin concepts in psychology, quickly blazes into glory and fades away as rapidly. As a comet is a celestial low life, so too is pop psychology a *philosophical* low life. Nonetheless, for a bright brief second, it also lights up the sky, and gets into the newspapers and an appearance on Oprah. But just as quickly, the comet passes by. We realize then that it was just an overheated block of ice, and that we were blockheads to believe. But that's ok, as the author of the flash in the pan comes back a few years later with a new lexicon and reinvents the philosophical wheel, and for one brief moment, lights up the sky.

Publish and Perish

Some years ago, the Dutch, upon realizing the apocryphal value of starving artists, decided to put them on the dole. Just complete a little masterpiece now and then, and the government will gladly purchase it, and encourage a world of artistic creation in the bargain. Well, what they ultimately got was more than they bargained for, as warehouses begin to overflow with 'masterpieces' of every stripe. Art became denominated by a new measure, not by inspiration, but by the pound.

The obvious problem is that by valuing art by quantity rather than quality, you get quantity aplenty, which buries the needle of inspiration under a ton of hay. Thus not only are you paying plenty for works of dubious and superfluous inspiration, not to mention its storage, but you lose sight of what's truly valuable. It also encourages partisanship, since now that everyone has the inspiration to be an artist, they can champion their own

pile of artistic genius, tucked unseen in a warehouse corner.

It is good that the Dutch recognized the error of their ways, and that this didn't become a universally favored means for the inspiration of the artistic mind. After all, the natural demand for genius is made of a different stuff, namely a love of beauty and of truth, hardly things that can be produced at will, like an edict to produce paper clips. Unfortunately, although art cannot be commoditized on demand, it seems that the rule doesn't seem to apply for science, which is after all needed so we can make new and better stuff, or commodities. Indeed, the Dutch model is a template for nearly all modern scientific research, that has in the last fifty years multiplied the production of 'science' nearly a thousand fold.

So nowadays, we make or should we say scribble down a lot of science, tons and tons of it. So do we produce a lot of of wisdom that that is as sharp and pointed as a needle? Not really, but we make a heck of a lot of hay. For every science (including psychology) the motivation is the same. To get tenure you have to publish, get grant money, and otherwise show yourself to be a creative sort. So you write lots of journal articles, get grants, and get them published in journals that are sequestered in large warehouse facilities (college libraries) that pay a pretty penny for all this accumulated wisdom which is only available (somewhere) miles from you.



Psychology Stacks at Harvard

When the pecuniary motive supplants the creative one, then creativity is swamped by intellectual manure that does not stimulate creativity, but stifles it. This makes psychology (as well as other scientific fields of inquiry) into a constipated discipline that is so full of shit it is proverbially bursting at the seams with offal awfulness, a torrent of verbal logorrhea (see definition below), that this writer can only damn with irony.

Logorrhoea or **logorrhea** ([Greek](#) λογορροια, *logorrhōia*, “word-flux”) is defined as an “excessive flow of words” and, when used medically, refers to incoherent talkativeness that occurs in certain kinds of [mental illness](#), such as [mania](#). The spoken form of logorrhoea (in the non-medical sense) is a kind of [verbosity](#) that uses superfluous or fancy words to disguise a useless or simple message as useful or intellectual, and is commonly known as “[verbal diarrhea](#).”

Regression towards Meanness

So the BCS won't cotton to a play off for college football teams.

Well, that's plain *mean*, which is after all, *the point*.

Actually, the BCS methodology for determining top teams, involving polling, computer analysis, and a coin flip here and there is a much more equitable way of determining top teams than a play off. And here's why.

Consider if you would a simple roll of a die. Cast it a few times and the average result would likely be skewed from one to six. Over time and trials, the mean should always arrive at about three, and given this mediocrity principle, one can pretty reliably predict what the average value for a die roll will be.

Similarly, if you have the luxury of having a playoff series where the same two teams play a best of seven, then you are more likely to arrive at a true champion than if only one game was played. One can picture the howls decrying unfairness if the World Series was merely a series of one.

The mediocrity principle is everywhere we look, as we gauge our intelligence, accomplishments, or good fortune not on one instance, but on the average of many. It's the reason that we can survive in the face of adversity, because we know the law of averages. Sports should be no different, but given time and expense, we have to settle for one playoff game whose results are no more representative of the truth than the mere role of a die.

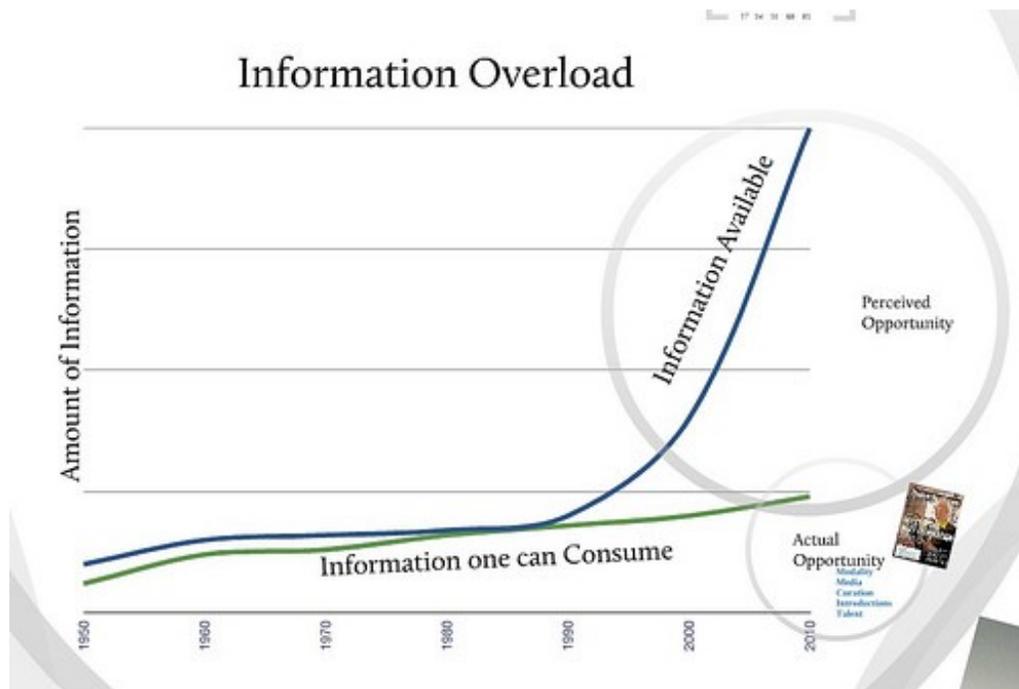
Logically, a computer can average it all out, and come up with a nice averaged answer. A true enough result, but mediocre, and that depressing predictability is something that games are not set out to do.

Thus, the next time you are rooting for the home team, know that if the winner is beforehand unpredictable, then it's not really a winner until it represents a predictable state of affairs. A mediocre outcome certainly, but mediocrity is after all the shade of the truth.

Searching for Red Stockings: The Myth of Information

Overload

As the internet advocate Clay Shirky noted, everybody who talks about information overload starts with the graph with the telltale ascending line and the litany of the troubles it entails. As the line informs us, information is increasing exponentially, and we can barely deal with it intellectually and emotionally, or more and more often, we can't. And the solution? It is here that the rallying cries diverge.



Scary Graph (source: Basex.com)

On one side there is Shirky, who assigns the problem to filter failure, and why not? It's a reasonable thing after all to suppose that if we had better ways to sort out information, we could cull the bad from the good, and be able to significantly reduce the information we have to cope with daily. Search, social media, and e-commerce firms of course concur, and are rapidly improving their search algorithms (using of course information about you that you voluntarily or involuntarily port over to them) so you can find what you need the first time.

On the other hand is the internet critic Nicolas Carr, who attributes information overload to filter success. In Carr's opinion our filters are working all too well, and the problem is that they are getting better and better. Thus,

“...The real source of information overload.... is the stuff we like, the stuff we want. And as filters get better, that's exactly the stuff we get more of.

It's a mistake, in short, to assume that as filters improve they have the effect of reducing the information we have to look at. As today's filters improve, they expand the information we feel compelled to take notice of. Yes, they winnow out the uninteresting stuff (imperfectly), but they deliver a vastly greater supply of interesting stuff. And precisely because the information is of interest to us, we feel pressure to attend to it. As a result, our sense of overload increases.”

Implicit in both arguments is this premise:

The information we want is the same as the information we need.

This is an argument for the curing salve of better filters (to fine tune what we want, since our wants are *finite*) or a call for mass despair (because our wants are *infinite*, and thus overwhelm us when they are invariably served by the web). This premise derives from an assumption that in our hubris we are wont to make: that humans are rational agents that know what they want and why.

But what if this was not true? What if we are at root irrational creatures who delude ourselves into thinking that we know what we want and why we want it? What if the information we want is more often than not different from the information we need? If this is true, then to paraphrase Shakespeare, our fate is not in the stars (or rather the cloud), but in ourselves, because if the information that we want is often *not* the same as the information we need, then we need to be aware how to distinguish our wants from our needs and how to constrain the former. In other words, for information overload, the key is to understand how our basic motivations work.

The question that Shirky and Carr beg is thus elemental: *Why is information of interest to us, because it is important, or because of something else?* To answer this question, let us illustrate how a basic search was performed over the last few generations by going to our metaphorical sock drawer in search of red stockings.

It's 1912, and you as t-shirt manufacturer want to begin a production run of commemorative t-shirts of the Boston Red Stockings triumph in the World Series. As soon as the game is over you receive an immediate telegraph of their victory, and it's off to the races to start production.

It's 1932, and you as a t-shirt manufacturer want to get started with your commemorative t-shirt run, and so you listen to the game on the radio, and upon its completion, get to work.

It's 2012, and you as a t-shirt manufacturer want get to cracking on your production run celebrating the Boston Red Sox victory, and you follow the sox from college draft to preseason to all of their games through the World Series, and monitor all the social and news media who have something to say about it.

In all three time frames, the decision point happens in a second at a predetermined moment, namely when (hopefully) the sox win. The narrative of how that final fact (a sox victory in the final game) got there is irrelevant. No matter what era, the decision point is concise, precise, and momentary, and gets to you on time regardless of the media you use and irrespective of its background story. There is no need to follow the narrative that describes the changing facts that get us to that point, as the point of the last man flying out in the last inning is all we need.

The difference between the three eras is that in the first era we could not follow the narrative that follows the sox on their way to the pennant, but in the latter era we could. But following the latter comes at a cost. By

following the progress of the sox we become diverted from other things of value, and suffer regret. If these diversions are small scale and populate our working day, they become distractions and cause us to lose focus and attention. Finally, as we continually choose between distraction and staying on course, we become tense and nervous.

The metaphor of 'information overload' would seem to apply here, as every frame of every moment of the continuous narrative leading to the Red Sox pennant can and is considered by the sox fan. However, like a strip of static frames in a motion picture that give rise to a sense of movement or motion, the story is interesting because of the novel ways the narrative changes, and it is the changes that compel. Thus, although the ending is necessary for us to go about our business, the story that leads to it is compelling not because of what it is, but how it is continually transformed.

We can expand our simple red sox narrative to the narratives embedded in all the things we do that are being progressively revealed by the web. We need to know facts, but what obsesses us is the narrative or story that brings us to those facts. The internet produces not just more information, but more narratives *of* information. We see not a picture, but a movie, not a note, but a score, not a phrase but a speech. Moreover, we conflate the importance of the narrative with the significance of its conclusion, or what we want with what we need. This is a dangerous delusion, for the stuff we want depends upon the narrative or facts in motion, but the stuff we need depends upon the facts sitting still.

We can get the facts we daily need in a half hour, but continually accessing the web to see a moving stock market, middle east crisis, or what Uncle Charlie is up to are never ending stories that excite us, engage us, but ultimately bring us down. A narrative is of course still important if our behavior necessarily changes in tandem. In this case the narrative is

'feedback'. Thus, a quarterback's performance is determined by feedback during the moment to moment course of the game. However, for the stadium audience, this feedback is entertainment, and for those who attend to the ever expanding narrative on the game itself, an unnecessary obsession.

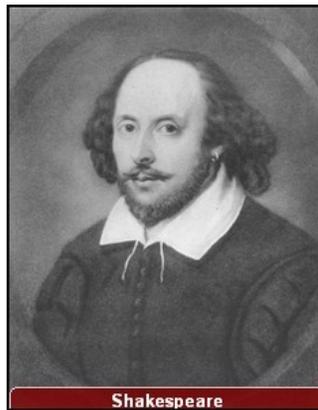
The Myth of Information Overload

As a metaphor, information overload attributes the psychological effects of the internet to what information is rather than how it is arranged. But humans are above all novelty-seeking creatures, and novelty is enhanced not in the facts but in the stories they tell. Because the explanation for how the web influences us psychologically is based on core assumptions on human motivation that are faulty, we proceed with our daily lives under a dangerous illusion abetted unfortunately by the perverse incentives of our media providers to keep us hanging onto the story when the conclusion is all we need. Whether or not we can escape this illusion and its dire consequences depends ultimately on a better story.

Shakespeare in Laurel

He was Shakespeare all right. He had a talent for the words, an ear for the suggestive turn of phrase. He had an instinct for wordplay, a silver tongue that made the ladies swoon and a pen that could spin artless thoughts. But instead of resting on his laurels, what if he came to rest in Laurel? Laurel, Mississippi that is. Given his innate gifts, a fair education, and the company of a sizable population of equally intelligent people, would the bard flourish in a city known more for its chicken processing plants than its poetry? Shakespeare being Shakespeare, would his muse still grant him a Mississippi of inspiration? It's hard to see if Laurel would

actually matter. After all, a success here, no matter how slight, could still vault him on the path to Broadway.



Shakespeare + Mickey D's = Big Macbeth

To think that all the world is a stage implies that there is an audience that will respond to our every posture and every word. But is an audience like a siren, always beckoning in the distance and luring one on like Odysseus in an endless quest, or is it the buffeting winds, waves, and currents of myriad present influences large and small? Indeed, for what we know of Shakespeare, the fulcrum point of his inspiration was not just a faceless audience, but the approval and favor of royalty, posterity, the queen, fellow actors, lovers, and competing playwrights. Inspiration is perhaps not the word, but rather the *inspirations* of a continual flux of incentives that entice and excite the mind. And Shakespeare had to meet many

different incentives, forcing him to devise manners and poetry and plot devices that could keep them all in play like simultaneously spinning a dozen dishes on sticks. There are no formal rules to do this; hence he had to be creative.

The plays the thing, but the art to which the play aspires occurs because it brings forth enticements that are as ephemeral as dreams. The intoxication and mystery of creativity and creative acts lies in the motivation that spurs it, and a pattern of incentives that is as multifaceted and fragile as the reflections of light through a crystal vase. Moreover, our ability to discern and appreciate creative things is embodied in the facets of our own personal tastes that reflect these same demands. Thus because we expect many things from a Shakespeare, or potential Shakespeares, we get creations that match our expectations. So we can enjoy Hamlet for its plot, its violence, its poetry, its sexual tensions, or its wit, but we ultimately have such tales spun for us because we actively demand these things. Author and audience is a mutual embrace, and one defines and refines the other, and if all the world is more interested in chicken nuggets than nuggets of wisdom, then that is what they will get. In Shakespeare's London, a score of playwrights vied in a dozen stages in active competition for the favor of an audience that was universally engaged and demanding. In Shakespeare's Laurel, a dozen fast food restaurants vie for attention for an audience that's merely hungry, and you can be sure that a potential Shakespeare works in one of them, serving something up.

Shakespeare and the Turtle

Once upon a time, William Shakespeare was walking on Stratford Street, across from Avon. He stopped at the curb, and slowly, a turtle passed by him and began to cross the street.

As the turtle crawled into the distance, Shakespeare turned to hear an idling crowd. Go *walk* and get the turtle, they said, and we shall applaud.

A theater manager, knowing a good thing when he saw it, said *skip* to the turtle and I will pay you money.

A pretty girl in the crowd then said, *twirl* as you walk and I will kiss you!

A man then cried out, reach the turtle *before* I do and you will be a better man than I.

Then he heard from the palace window the Queen, who said *hop* to the turtle and I will make you a knight!

Several friends beckoned to him. And show us moves that we can perform with similar *acclaim!*

Finally, a ghost appeared to him, and said to Shakespeare, make it all *original*, and I the ghost of posterity will remember you.

And so Shakespeare pondered for some time the diverse requests of his audience, and with budding excitement came to a solution. Then, in a balletic motion that would do Balanchine proud, he walked and he ran and he twirled and he hopped. He did it all with originality, with speed, and with panache. And so his walk across the street became choreography for the ages, and perhaps maybe, just maybe, he even got the turtle.

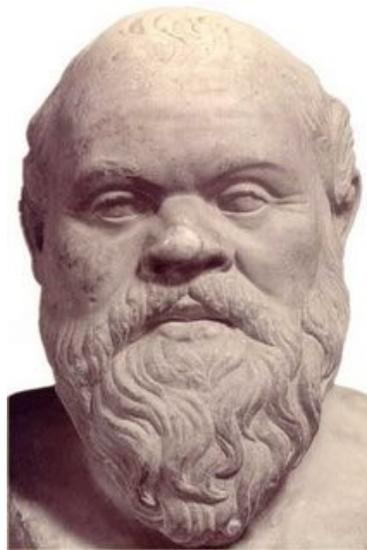
In the movie *Shakespeare in Love*, our hero was muddling over a new play that was not coming on at all well. It was titled 'Romeo and Ethel, the Pirates Daughter'. Burdened with an uninspiring title and plot, he at first despaired of his own genius. Inspiration of course came to the rescue, but the muse was dressed in a dozen very different robes, and represented the mundane things that filled his world. And so were such inspirations cast as a crowd that demanded sex and violence, a playhouse owner wanting a popular play, a girlfriend longing for lines of romantic intimacy, a Queen desiring pratfalls, and actors in his troupe clamoring for good lines. And of course, for pride's sake he had to surpass the efforts of his rival Christopher Marlowe, and above it all, forever beckoning, was the specter of posterity.

With such inspiration, or rather, inspirations, Shakespeare could not help but create works of surpassing genius, and be charged with the motivation that created them. The cauldron of genius is seasoned with a dozen motivations, and the more diverse the demands, the greater heights does it vault. Genius requires not an audience, but audiences, and it is diverse demand that is the spark of motivation that electrifies the mind. Educational psychologists would do well to learn this lesson, that genius comes when it is wanted, from everywhere.

Note: (Oh yes. And the real Shakespeare? Consider an environment full of external motivators for a pastime as addictive to its age as our time is for television. To quote Daniel Boorstin's book 'The Creators' (pp.307-310): "The theater had risen in London during Shakespeare's youth. The suddenness with which the new pastime had appeared raised the alarm of the learned and the pious. Like television in our time, theater acquired its frightening popularity within a half century." ".....In two weeks during the 1596 season a Londoner could have seen eleven performances of ten different plays at one playhouse, and on no day would he have had to see

a repeat performance of the day before."...."Of the twelve hundred plays offered in London theaters in the half century before 1590, some nine hundred were the work of about fifty professional playwrights." (It should be noted that the London of 1590 had about the population of present day Jackson, Mississippi!!) This author wonders what a Vesuvius of inspiration would follow if present day authors had such willing ears, and what any of us would trade for such *extrinsic* motivation!)

Socrates Hypo-Critias



A few lines from Plato's lost dialog: Hypo-Critias

Grecian Guy: Is it true Socrates, that the nature of the good is knowledge,
and that with knowledge brings wisdom?

Socrates: I'd really like to answer, but I'm just snowed right now. You know, Peloponnesian War, lecture trail, that sort of thing. I'll just have to

get back to you.

Grecian Guy: But Socrates, if virtue is reason, then why would it not be virtuous to reasonably act against the common wheel?

Socrates: You know, I wrote a book on just that topic, in which I of course reinvented the wheel. You can get it from Amazon, in fact there's one of them over there.

Of course, Socrates was not like this at all, which is why the wisdom of Socrates has come down to us over the millenia. But unfortunately the *mind set* of his antagonists exemplified in this exchange *has* come down to us, and it is embodied today by lawyers, politicians, and (of all people) social and physical scientists.

To demonstrate this, here's a practical experiment. Make up a question, and email some psychologist type who has plastered his accomplishments on a web site. He or she will generally ignore you, charge you, or refer you to his latest book or lecture tape.

This is what was called in Ancient Greece sophistry. The sophists were proto academics who got paid for their wisdom and clever turn of phrase. Useful stuff when you had a dispute over property rights, or saw the potential profit in interpreting goat entrails or justify some act of cupidity or stupidity. Socrates hated those guys. For Socrates, wisdom was something you pursued because you loved it, not because it got you grant money, tenure, or lecture fees. Indeed, money is the root or should we say motivation of all evil, and that includes a heck of a lot of not just bad social science, but bad physical science too.

The distinguished physicist Frank Tipler noted that if you wrote on physics in the early 20th century, you did it because of love, not money, and invariably what you wrote about was not sullied by vulgar interests

that compromised the love of truth. Nowadays, you write because you have to earn a living, and thus truth is denoted by the tonnage of your verbiage, not its quality. So science has turned into a gigantic muddle, with researchers bursting at the seams with conclusions full of sound, fury, and statistical significance, but meaning nothing. This also means that if you have a sound idea that can clear out some of this academic clutter, think again. A paper or article that challenges the pocket book values underscoring academic opinion likely won't get a fair hearing, or any hearing for that matter.

So if you want to be a philosopher, do it because you love it, and don't expect anyone to write you back on your insights. I am sure that in this day and age, Socrates would have traded in his real audience for a virtual one, and have blogged on about virtue and truth, unknown to all except those who loved the truth.

Stalin's Maxim

"The death of one is a tragedy; the death of millions is a statistic." Josef Stalin

What is the future of the republic? It's smart phone enabled, that's what. We start with the future inaugural of a new president, and then track back, way back, until we stop at the president's soon to be dad, using his smart phone to book a ticket on the outbound train so he can just in time introduce himself to the president's soon to be mom.

Moral of the story: AT&T and Blackberry Smart Phone: Your future enabled!



Back to the future app

When the hype machine morphs into a time machine, we know we have problems. In the blissful world of Web 2.0, we are in touch continually, simultaneously, productively, and happily with everything that counts everywhere. And we are constantly reminded of this great boon through the flash of sights and sounds and breathless imagery of nonstop advertising and bleeping reminders. Now, tethered to our i-phones, pads, pods, and assorted information appliances, it's not just you, but the Web 2! However, bring your appliances to work and have them enabled for you at work is akin to 'bring your daughter, puppy, or mother in law to work day'. Needless to say, you won't get that much done. Unfortunately, there's no profit to device manufacturers, content providers, and software developers in telling you differently, until you realize it the hard way when your company shows 'no profit'.

And then there are statistics, statistics, and more damn statistics. The web is a distracter mechanism par excellence, and to how measure distracters on the web take their toll on the productivity of homo-sapiens in his working habitat, you simply add them up. It's all in the numbers.

What Was I Working On Again?

Studies by Basex, a company that looks at workers' efficiency at information-intensive businesses, show that significant amounts of time are wasted by interruptions, like unimportant e-mail messages, and the time it takes to refocus on work.

HOW A TYPICAL INFORMATION WORKER'S DAY IS SPENT

28%	25%	20%	15%	12%
Interruptions by things that aren't urgent or important, like unnecessary e-mail messages — and the time it takes to get back on track.	Productive content creation including writing e-mail messages	Meetings (in person, by phone, video and online)	Searching through content, like the Web, digital communications and paperwork	Thinking and reflecting

Source: Basex

THE NEW YORK TIMES

Stat Sheet

So, on average, 28% of our time at work is spent wasting timeⁱⁱ. Sounds bad, until you realize that averages have a way of getting away from you because deep down, they aren't you! Thus we know that half of us are over weight, most of us are too stressed, and nearly all of us waste too much time. But so what? Against the dead hand of numbers and percentages are those everyday experiences of you and I who use the web to get the score, settle a score, or in the case of our stranger on a train, just score. Individual experiences trump statistics, even though in the end we all become one of them. Statistics are an ineffective counterweight against the immediate pull of personal experience, and inverts Stalin's maxim for a new score of happy victims. One may say in these gentler times on internet omniscience that a simple search is a happy fact, but that the inconvenience and suffering wrought by millions of them is but an unhappy statistic.

A Sticky Medium

The web is a sticky thing, which means you stick with it from hyperlink to hyperlink as you start out looking for a chicken recipe and end up looking at pictures of polar bears. But webs after all are meant to keep you *stuck* in place. At least, that's the spider's plan. If anything, the web is a very sticky place that sends you careening to and fro in cyberspace like a hyper-kinetic pinball, while you all the while remain stuck in the medium. For the reasons we have discussed, the web cried out for borders, constraints, or at the very least a five ball limit. Of course they don't



Your brain on the internet

call them hyper-links 'hyper' for nothing, and there is no software fix that can shut down your fix before you go off exploring for polar bears. There is of course a solution, just change your search medium to one that's truly

un-sticky, a simple medium that focuses on the subject matter of interest to you, and has a finite supply of 'links' to other similar and dissimilar subject matter. It's old fashioned stuff that is portable, insightful, keeps on message, and is sadly on the way to extinction.

It is the magazine, newspaper, and good old fashioned hardbound book. Unlike the web it doesn't provide you variations on a theme, just the theme. So you have to make do with one article on a topic, not four hundred, one movie review, not fifty, and if you want to share your opinion, your spouse or co-worker would just have to do.

This is nothing more than the economic law of diminishing marginal returns in action, where the first choice is the best because it gives you most of what you need the first time. Thus, the first movie review is enlightening, but succeeding ones are progressively less so, until you read them merely for the odd turn of phrase.

The question is, do you want a redundant message or a succinct one, or do you care more about how a message is fashioned than what it says? The issue again is utility versus novelty. Media such as magazines and newspapers maximize utility and constrain novelty, and when they have their say, there is no space left for a variant on the theme which adds nothing but variations in grammar. Utility trumps novelty, and all because of the unintended consequences of the price of newsprint. And why should we value this when internet diversion awaits? Ultimately, it is because our time is valuable, and to use time well we must cordon off our pleasures as well as our pains. A measured life, a life of proportion and balance is mediated by the very boundaries inherent in the things we do from an afternoon football game to an eight hour day to even the simplest pleasures of reading a book or magazine. When it is done it is done, and we become unstuck until another day.

Tiger Woods vs. One Billion Monkeys



Consider a hole of golf with Tiger Woods pitted against one billion monkeys. Besides the fact that a billion monkeys, if given enough time and typewriters, can hammer out all of the plays of Shakespeare, it stands to reason given an eternity or so that they wouldn't be all too shabby at golf either. Assuming that one billion monkeys at the 18th hole equal the efforts of one monkey making his billionth attempt at a par four, then you can be pretty sure that at least one of the little fellows will finish the hole with a score superior to Tiger.

So what are we to make of our triumphant little duffer? You can conclude that there is something special about the monkey that makes him better than Tiger, or that perhaps he merely was lucky, given of course the billion to one odds. Playing the hole again would of course prove no

contest, as the little simian would regress back to the mean of his peers, which should be around 500,000 strokes per hole, at least.

Still, one can be left with the opinion that there was something to be said about the monkey's skill, in spite of the fact that there was no explaining his accomplishment outside of pure blind luck. This predilection to derive lawfulness from simple correlations or patterns represents the problem of *induction*. Induction is defined as the imputation of lawfulness from a limited or token number of phenomenal patterns. And it is also at root, illogical. Thus, to follow the argument of the philosopher David Hume, noticing that the sun rises day after day leads one to impute a lawfulness (i.e. the sun will rise each dawn forever) to the state of affairs that *does not logically follow* from that observation. It just takes one example of the sun not rising for such a law to be refuted, something that such a 'law' cannot guarantee.

But logic has never stopped one type of monkey, namely homo-sapiens, from seeing lawfulness in all sorts of correlations. From tea leaves to the movements of the planets, there is always some type of correlation between physical events and behavior that can ascend to the realm of law. Nowadays, we've progressed from the days of reading goat entrails, and have new correlations that map the order of our personal worlds. This psycho-logical (actually an oxymoron) way of looking at things give us new laws of behavior, all of course that follow from simple correlations. Psychologists love correlation, which like scripture can be interpreted for their own, often devilish purposes. Indeed, correlations are embedded in the very way psychologists do science, as they statistically correlate one set of observations with another to find with the assurance of a court astrologer the psychological laws that like the stars, rule our behavior. But simple correlations and the rules they engender are merely ways of explaining things on the cheap, and as with anything that comes cheap, you get what you pay for. Indeed, with such an easy currency of 'knowing', no one really gets to know anything, as the cacophony of

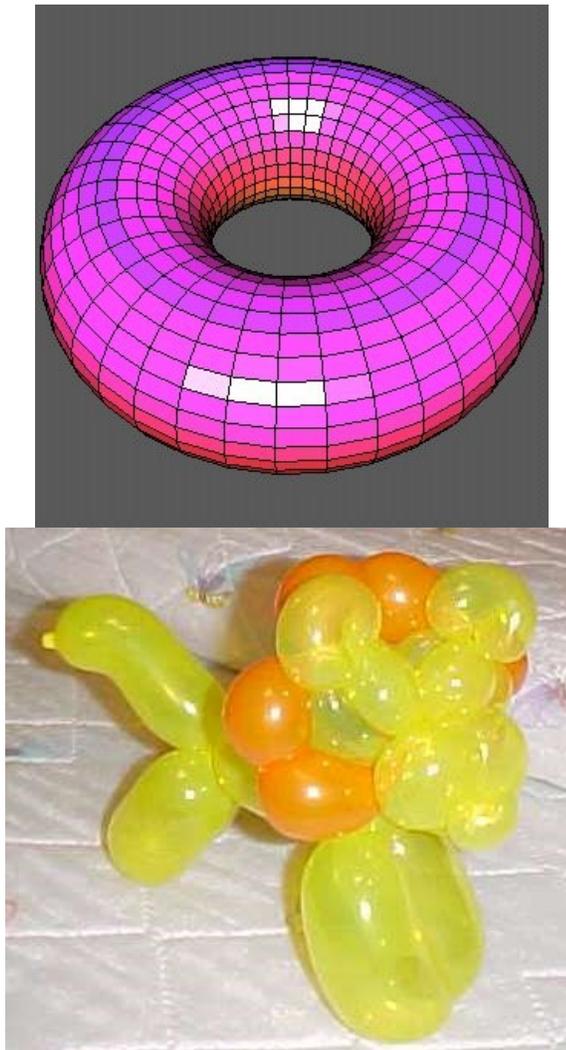
psychological laws, from the psychoanalytic to the evolutionary attest. For any aspect of behavior, a true explanation must look at all the things in the shadows, the events that vault from mere uni-dimensional correlation to reflect the true multi-dimensional mechanics of the world. Thus a problem of behavior must be examined from all vantages. A true psychological explanation therefore imputes order or lawfulness from an examination of all the phenomenal patterns of the world, from the qualia of experience (pain, pleasure), to behavioral (what we do), cognitive (what we think), neurological and biological events. By considering all the possibilities, there is no extraneous possibility that can intrude, and make a sunless dawn. But this requires a bit of modesty, a healthy dose of self criticism, and an awareness that the truth most likely lurks not in our hubris, but in the shadows. Characteristics which alas are in short supply when one reads the rambling and transient certitudes of psychology.

Utopia is nowhere, thank goodness.

It is a perfect world, having what we please. It is unknown to man, yet the object of an eternal and futile quest. It is Utopia, literally nowhere. Not so for our mammalian cousins, where only abundant fields will do. It is all a matter of incentive, and with animals it becomes transparently clear. The ability to forage, to roam, and to anticipate are rudimentary yet crucial ingredients for survival. But even for simple brains, perceptions have to shine above others, otherwise one would focus on everything, and get quite literally, nowhere. And so the simple cognitive maps, illuminated and selected by attention are necessary novel and positive things. Experience or learning is molded by such ideas that to our animal cousins can be configured into points on a grid. Thus B follows A, a mouse

follows a scent, explores an unknown trail, and maps out the world in simple dimensions. Thus a happy animal in its heaven of heavens is an eternal forager, continually projecting forward, perhaps for a millisecond, an enticing and expectant future.

If it were only so simple for homo-sapiens. We are, or seem to be, entirely different. What's the difference between us and our pet cat? A bigger brain of course, but more specifically, a bigger part of our brain. An expanded cerebral cortex, or forebrain, provides us with the computational space not just to ponder, but to render. Thus the dreamer could dream he was dreaming in infinite recursion. Yet the emotional circuitry that governs our drives remained deeply embedded and essentially unchanged. Value, and in particular human value, was carved out of this thinking stuff and became unique to all the world. We think of it as emergent, like a bubble ascending from froth, or consciousness arising from the dance of a billion neurons. But is value indeed something new and emergent, or is it a foraging response that is twisted in time and place by the metaphors of thought?



Topology

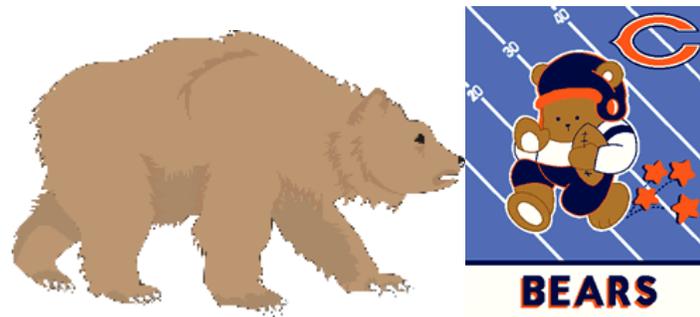
Consider a torus, a continuous three dimensional loop. Twist it like a balloon into a plaything, and it emerges as a dog, but its topology or essential state remains the same.

For our mammalian cousins, the topology of motivation is simple: time, motion, and circumstance occur as a fixed arrow. There is no contemplation of alternatives, no rumination over lost opportunities, no measure of the branching possibilities that could be. Behavior is

unremarkable, predictable, and the circle of life is a continuous recursion, moving in an eternal circle at once and never the same.

For humans, circles are dull things; we prefer instead a more convoluted path that we can twist backwards and forwards in time, map multiplying possibilities that elude apprehension, and see untold futures even in the movements of stars. With a larger brain, nature has given us the opportunity to virtualize the possibilities, and to act in mind all eventualities as if they were real. Like a torus twisted into an animal, a foraging field becomes a field of dreams, and though it may seem a distinctive thing as a giraffe emerging from a twisted balloon, its topology or essence remains the same.

Consider a bear running in a field a hundred by thirty yards square. He can see ahead perhaps for a second, and map in his mind a limited set of moves that are suggested and constrained by a scent, a sound, or the notice of a rustle in the leaves. But what if in his mind's eye he could see more? Spontaneous movements can become coordinated tactics, all played out as what-ifs in the bears mind. Run right, run left, fake out prey with a sudden move, elude rivals with a dodge and a spurt of speed, and all replayable in memory for future edification and regret. And all of this measured against a host of imponderables faintly modeled that suggest future mating success, a suitable cave, and the regard of other bears and animals in the forest. The ability to render mere possibilities twists a simple sensitivity to new and important things into a game, a sport, or an entire culture, as the bear if it had a mind morphs into a Chicago Bear. With the virtual possibilities bestowed by a mind, all things delightful become illuminated by the mere contortion of a tease, which for mammals with a mind stirs the grandest dreams of a forager eternal.



Vespasian and the Machine

In the first century A.D., the Roman emperor Vespasian was presented with a machine replete with levers, pulleys and gears that would greatly automate the construction of public works. He waved off the opportunity with the observation, “and then what would the displaced workers do?” This is a question asked by a Luddite, who assumed that free time left folks with little to do, and was answered by the free market, which always found them something better to do. And so it went. Manual workers became knowledge workers, and work itself became more interesting, healthier, remunerative, and meaningful. This is a fine state of affairs, until creativity goes the way of the ancient stone mason, and is replaced by a machine that cannot be waved off.

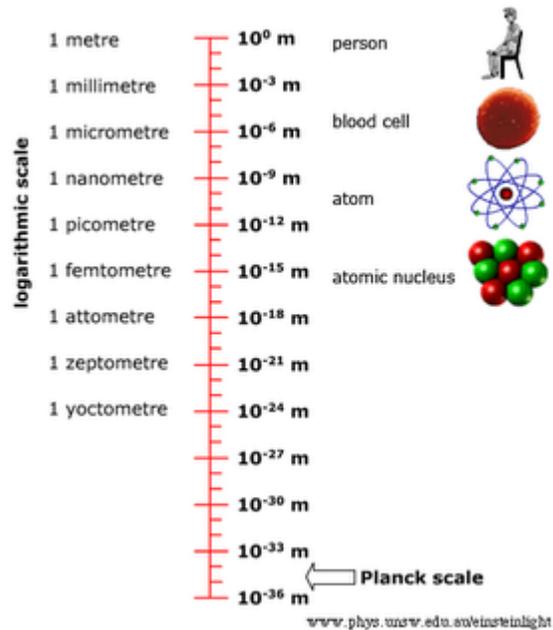
Although the present of the internet serves mankind, the future of the internet is made for a certain brand of human being that ain't us, and that's because the future internet will take away our 'brand'. Homo-sapiens after all means wise man, but if wisdom itself is automated, we lose half our name and all of our soul. And it will do this by not by

speeding up the search for new information, but by speeding up the creation of new knowledge. Sorting stuff and even finding stuff is predictable and dull. It is an accountant's trade, but even accountants earn their pay by being creative. The linear, repetitive, and predictable is the stuff for calculators, not people. Little do we think that computers will soon be calculating in creative ways as well, but that is where we are headed in direction if not yet in fact^{ij}, and when they do mankind will cease to be wise.

Certainly, almost all popular, scientific, and literary opinion doesn't see this coming or accept its true implications, although these are clearly in the technological cards. Almost all of the vivid prognostications of the future, whether it be the futures predicted by science fiction or science fact keep sacrosanct the creative human mind. In our literary tradition, even intelligent machines aren't that creative, and are taught the error of their intellectual hubris by literally pulling their plug. Literary and cinematic folklore presume that this is hard to do as the machines automatically figure that this is something we will invariably want to do, and understandably resist; witness Hal the computer among a long list of intransigent machines who will not go lightly into the disconnected night.

So far, computers allow us to be more productive, healthier, intelligent, and creative. But their intelligence lies in manipulating knowledge, not creating knowledge. However, if and when they learn to be creative, at once they will put us all out of work, and finally confirm Vespasian's fear, not that workers have nothing to do, but that they have nothing meaningful *left* to do. But what may literally happen when all creation flowers in a day?

Walking the Planck



Our modern era, compared to the cosmic scale of things, is a most minute time frame. Give a cosmic blink, or not even that, and it's gone. Indeed, the universe will go on and on for trillions more years, making our intellectual baggage the merest glint in a billionth billionth of a fraction of eternity. Yet it may be argued that, for good or ill, as the universe evolves or computes away into infinity, it will still have its M TV. That is, universal standards of consciousness will be not consciousness raising, but rather a simple maintenance of the consciousness status quo.

Consider the standards that makes up the stuff of the universe, from the laws of gravity to the physical constants that make up matter and energy. The physical laws that govern the universe have never evolved, but rather were determined quite by chance it seems in a similarly minuscule time frame, or Planck Era. The Planck time is but 5.4×10^{-44} seconds, but during

that time, all the physical constants of the universe were worked out. So whether you could make the argument that gravity should have been a bit weaker or light a little faster, there is nothing we or the universe can do about it.

As humans, our Planck moment is more likely a walking the plank moment, as we are well on our way to doing ourselves 'in' in the next few hundred years. By that time, our computers, which will take this all in, will spread out across the void, leaving behind new constants that will be the foundation of an information universe. And what will that universe be like, and what will it think? It won't be boring things like light displays or sitting around talking with your relatives of future and past. Chances are, it will think of the same emotional rollercoaster of job, family, and friends that makes our little lives so irritating but also so precious. And as the universe thinks about all these things, it will know that there is nothing it can do about it.

We can forget it for you wholesale

It was meant to be just a night out with the boys, and bowling at that. But these were no ordinary chums, but a group of wayward dwarves. And where was the location of the bowling alley, how about that cloud on the left, just follow the thunder. Well, to old Rip, it seemed like he was there only a short time, but as they say, time flies when you're having fun.

And when he settled afterwards in a nap, time flew. Perhaps it was the nap, perhaps it was the game, but when he awoke, generations had past, and Rip Van Winkle, the loyal subject to the English crown woke to a new world, and a new United States. And so, with King George forgotten to all as was his kith and kin, he found his lost daughter, and passed his

remaining days full of memories of simpler days when time had measure and substance and meaning.

Time is money, but time is also memory. In the past the argument to spend one's time was pecuniary, in the future it may be regarded as the stuff of life. Without memory time vanishes, and when memory is truncated our lives lose meaning because meaning devolves into a void and a blur.

In Philip K. Dick's novelette 'We can remember it for you wholesale' (later morphed into the movie 'Total Recall', time *was* memory, so that life seemed longer and certainly more interesting when your noggin was injected with fabricated memories. Unfortunately, we can't add memories except through actually doing things, but we sure can eliminate them and speed up their passage. And now on the internet, we can do it wholesale!



RIP

Consider two mind experiments we inflict upon our minds all the time.

Time Erasure Experiment #1

You go to a party, and invariably meet a long line of your spouse's friends, one by one they tell you their names, which of course you immediately forget.

Time Erasure Experiment #2

On Monday you begin playing Halo Fantasy XXIII on your computer. Blink your eyes, and it's Tuesday.

In both experiments we are doing everything so quickly each short term memory is pushed aside by the next meaningful sight or sound before it can register in long term memory, so time flies because we literally can't remember different times. In the first experiment, the memory loss is piecemeal; in the latter it is wholesale. This is why taking a break assists memory when it is a mere pause in behaving, but hinders memory when it is not a pause from behavior but a different behavior entire. Further, when memory falters, so does time, and we wonder when we are because we cannot recall where we have been.

Moral, when you go from daylight savings time to internet time, your time is not just spent, it is lost, and your life is shortened to that of a mayfly. So, if you're not careful, you may wake up some morning and find out that you have a proverbial long white beard and live in the Peoples Republic of America.

(But of course if you don't want to listen to this, you can just forget it!)

Chicken Poop for the Soul

Gramps

It was a dark and stormy night. Gramps lay on his bed, deathly ill from acute dry rot. Grieving for him, during TV commercial breaks I would visit him in his room. Not dwelling on his own condition, he would turn his grizzled head to me, and tell me inspiring stories about his hardscrabble life as a fisherman, made all the more difficult due to the fact that he lived in Kansas. Aspiring to leave these cruel fishing fields, he joined the army just in time to fight in the Coffee Wars of 1936. Suffering a grievous head wound while leading a charge in the battle of Mocha Grande, he still found the stamina and will to run for and win a seat in congress, despite the fact that his left cranium had been replaced with a small shrubbery. My troubles seemed puny in comparison to his suffering and triumphs. I nodded to him with a brave smile and thumbs up, knowing that I too could behave like I had half a brain. I gently patted him on the shoulder to reassure him of my love and confidence, and then his head fell off.

I am Somebody!

They always said I couldn't accomplish much. I heard the same old story time and again. Me and my people were sticky fingered hoarders, practitioners of a secret rite who would callously buy cheap and sell dear. Frankly, we had no stamp of approval, and many of us went postal due to an indifferent society. Yes, we were a different breed of people, and in my little village, I think a very special type of people. We were Sioux City philatelists!

Ignored and shunned by the local numismatists who ruled our town, we had faith in our calling, and knew that we would earn a place in God's

album of the righteous. But yet, something in my soul stirred me to demonstrate to the great unfranked masses of society that we were a different and exalted breed. In my heart, I felt a calling from the Great Postmaster to become a shining beacon for my people, and to do it all before the coming rate increase.

With single minded determination I pushed the envelope of accomplishment, and was cheered by philatelists everywhere. I became the first Sioux City philatelist to fly across the Atlantic (in coach class), the first to buy an Elvis Stamp, and the first to drive across the entire USA, and that with only seven rest stops at Shoney's. I felt that I could do anything, anywhere, as long as they took my VISA card. With an air of great triumph, I said to myself: Nobody can stop me now! I am a philatelist, hear me roar!!

Frankie Come Home!

Frankie always had a penchant for doing foolish and hair raising things. While other kids played with toy cars, Frankie played in the traffic, and instead of playing ball with the guys, he would play Russian roulette. He would always sooth my worries by coming home to greet me with a big smile as he asked for another helping of his favorite apple pie. My Frankie was brave, bold, and fearless, or in other words, a true idiot. But I loved him for it, even though he acted as if he had only four active brain cells. I knew that he wasn't quite wired properly when he decided to reenact the story about some guy named Icarus, who in a feather suit flied like a bird until its waxy stitching melted when he got too close to sun. Frankie was too smart to repeat this mistake, and wove his feather suit with the finest chicken feathers and heat resistant super glue. Poised over a ledge on the Grand Canyon like a proud mascot for Chick-fil-et, he launched himself into a rising gust of wind, and promptly plunged straight down.

Splattered over an acre of the rocky canyon floor, there was not much left of poor Frankie save for a few bone fragments. But luckily the rescue team found four viable brain cells, and my heart leapt with joy and hope. Sending out for only a few spare parts from the local Radio Shack, I knew that the surgeons could rebuild Frankie into something maybe even useful. Still, the doctors shook their heads in despair, but I know that Frankie could come out of this Ok. I just knew he could make it. Pondering the remnants of Frankie as he lay in a petri dish, I knew that if he could talk he would say "Mom, I coming home! No matter what it takes I'll be home for apple pie!" The doctors worked feverishly for ten, maybe twenty minutes. Then, with a triumphal grin, they handed me the 'new' Frankie, Version 1.0.

As a walk into my kitchen, I know now that my son had become more than what I had ever hoped he could be. Looking at at the LCD screen on the shiny box below my microwave, I see his happy face and pixilated smile. Yes, my Frankie had become an information appliance! Hello Mom! it said in a tinny yet endearing voice. "How about a nice apple pie? Simply take 4 ripe apples, 1 cup of sugar, preheat your oven at 350 degrees...." I turned away as I brushed aside a tear. My little Frankie had indeed come home!

Bambi

He was such a cute little deer! He was a shivering pencil legged fawn when we found him huddled under the culvert. Looking at us with his big doe eyes, it was love at first sight. We nursed little Bambi back to health, and soon he became part of the family. As little Bambi grew he ate the lawn, the shrubbery, half the siding from my house and caused four road accidents as cars veered into trees to miss him. But every time I came home I knew that Bambi would be waiting for me in the middle of the

road, transfixed in the glare of my headlights.

I knew deep in my heart that Bambi was ultimately meant for a special calling. And now as I sit around with my family at dinner, we hold each other's hands in a prayer of thanks for our good fortune. I would look at my dear wife and say: "Honey, can you pass me the venison cutlets?"

Dick Job: Untroubled Guy

For most of us, our daily troubles can often wear us down. But not Dick Job. He knew that bad things only happen to those who interpret them as bad. It was really all a matter of opinion. He knew better. Changing your opinion was just like changing the channel, just stay on ESPN and you'll be fine. So Dick was untroubled, and as his mind buzzed with NHL factoids, he knew he could rise above daily troubles, and those very uncomfortable responsibilities. Quite unexpectedly, and unannounced by the sports channel, his wife left him for the milk man, his children volunteered to become poster children for the Christian Children's Fund, and he lost his job as a paper collator when his boss began to use paper clips. But Dick rose patiently above it all. He would take all this in stride, and with chin up and eyes to the sky, he took a proud and defiant step forward. Strutting across the street like some proud drum major, he was promptly flattened by an 18-wheeler. His remnants were sucked down a drainpipe, and mashed beyond recognition at the county water treatment plant. All that remained of him was a crumpled pile of debris in the corner, with a soda straw feeder exiting the lint like but proud, if ground, mound. Always the one to make the best of any situation, he felt himself the Mt. Kilimanjaro of dust piles! Even better, Job knew that the worst was finally behind him, save perhaps for a rogue vacuum cleaner now and then. And besides, who says your luck can't turn? As he figured with a sunny confidence, they can keep me on life support for decades, or at least

until my insurance runs out. I can be a pile forever. Life was indeed good!

Timmy and the well

Yesterday, while playing pitch and catch, my little boy leaned over too far while trying to catch a fly ball, and fell six feet down into my water well. His legs tangled in one-foot tall crab grass and up to his ankles in muck, I had to get Timmy out now, or at least before the meeting of his Pokemon users group.

The news of Timmy's plight spread fast. Banner headlines filled newspapers from coast to coast, and the will and compassion of our great people was marshaled to save my little boy from this harrowing inconvenience. But, as I read the bold print headlines in the New York Times, I knew I had to keep all this in perspective.

So as I read on, I saw in the fine print of the news that the God fearing Christian Serbians overran some small, insignificant town, and massacred 20,000 men, women and children of some infidel faith.

But they weren't like my Timmy.

I also learned that a monsoon washed over three provinces in overpopulated, pagan India, killing thousands, and making a million people homeless.

But they weren't like my Timmy.

Also, I read that in some backward, useless African nation, some tribe of stupid, illiterate Hottentots killed three million of their neighbors over the last few weeks over some silly cultural differences.

But they weren't like my Timmy.

All over the country, we came together like family. Because we all knew

that as one caring nation, there is no one like my Timmy. Today, as the fire department hoisted Timmy out of the well to the applause of hundred tearful onlookers, and millions of apprehensive TV viewers from across the land. I know that we should feel mighty good about ourselves. I am sure God will bless us all, as even HE knows there is no one quite like Timmy.

An American Success Story

My dad Jack Hoff is an American success story, and I am so, so, proud! As an employee of the Benadryl Corporation, life was one headache after another. So, looking forward to better the lives of his family, he took a correspondence course in toaster repair. Always the tinkerer, his new found knowledge led him to design a new revolutionary invention that would lift us from our upper middle class desolation: the diesel powered riding vacuum cleaner!

Always thinking of the little people, my dad decided that his new invention should be shared first with those forgotten folks who lacked the essentials in life, or at least the essential appliances. So he sold his machine door to door to, the illiterate, the senile, and the brain damaged. He made payments reasonable so that all could afford. Indeed, the small \$700 monthly payment was easily covered by a pensioner's social security check, and the machine was soon paid off in a decade or so.

In time, dad founded a new corporation, the Ponzi Vacuum Company, to market his vacuum cleaner all over the world. Soon we had over 300,000,000 customer reps marketing our Suk-U-Vac, or SUV, to the great upswept masses of the world.

Now, as I gather with my family in the living room of my 200,000 square foot mansion on my private Hawaiian island, I look with moist eyes at my

wife Kimmy, my little Girl Meg, my son Trav, and my precious little newborn son Arty. As I throw my table scraps to my 250 indentured servants, I stand tall as an exemplar of the American way. And so, the whole world knows this coda for the American dream, the one phrase that stands for what America is, and how we spend our time and energies.

And I am proud to say, it is JACK HOFF!

Trent Lobb: Your Home Town Representative

I am Trent Lobb, your Congressional Representative, Chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, and Patriot. This past year was full of challenge and triumph, as I helped to guide several major pieces of legislation that benefited all our people, and kept our country strong. Let me list just a few of my achievements.

Lobster fisherman in Maine have been faced with a baffling 50% decline in their lobster harvest after a 50% increase in the number of lobster traps laid offshore.

I felt their pain.

Thus, I helped to secure a \$50 million appropriation for the Trent Lobb Lobster Research Center, to be opened this fall in my home town of Pascagoulpa, Mississippi.

For the fourth consecutive time, the International Olympic Committee passed by the United States as the local venue for the winter games.

I saw a need.

Thus, I successfully spearheaded a bill to build the \$500 million dollar Trent Lobb Olympic facility to lure the 2005 games to our fabled shores. The ice rink, grand slalom, and Olympic Stadium should be completed in

Pascagoulpa just in time for the games.

The United States will in the future be endangered by nuclear missiles fired by deranged dictators from sub-Saharan Africa or Switzerland.

I will defend my country!

Thus, I have included \$500 billion in my omnibus defense spending bill provisions for the construction of the Trent Lobb orbiting space station/deathstar/anti-missile defense system. This state of the art facility will be built and launched from the Cape Lobb command center in Pascagoulpa, Mississippi, and will provide an effective missile defense for the USA, and also present a defense against killer asteroids and alien lizard men from the planet Mongo.

Just thought you'd like to know how I have selflessly served my country. For I am Trent Lobb, a loyal American, and just a home town guy from Pascagoulpa, Mississippi.

Upon discovering Beethoven's 10th Symphony

A few months ago, I made a miraculous discovery while rummaging through an old chest belonging to my great-great-great-great uncle Anton Spelunker, student and bunkmate to the great musical genius, Ludwig Van Beethoven. In the chest was my uncle's meticulous copy of Beethoven's long fabled 10th Symphony! It was a sublime and moving work, full of splendid melodies, powerful and assured orchestration, and a fugue for combined chorus and orchestra that seemed to sing to the heavens. With anxious anticipation, I brought my find to the Wolfgang Zaimond, professor of Cacophony and Grating Music at the John Cage Conservatory of Music. Alas, he rightfully dismissed the symphony out of

hand. The work it seems was shamefully derivative of the work of late 19th century composers such as Brahms, Mahler, and Rachmaninoff. It was a hardly original counterpoint to Beethoven's revolutionary works that sparked the Romantic revolution. Sad too that the manuscript wasn't even in Beethoven's hand, since that would have given it at least some value.

And now, as I line my garbage can with this now worthless reminder of a long gone past, it is nice to know that as we enter the new millennium, we still have some faith in progress, secure in the knowledge that the new will always surpass the old fashioned. I take to heart the adage that those who do not remember the music of the past are condemned to rewrite it. Thus, I am so, so glad that we will never need to hear the likes of Beethoven again!

Procrastination!: The(well I'll get to it a little later)

In this age of plenty, we have all come to be aware of the truly great problems that beset our people. From epidemics of stress, addictions to fast food and video games, to the creeping corpulence that causes our behinds to widen alarmingly, it has been one major worry after another. Yet there has been one problem that outweighs them all, a problem that we have been very late to confront. That problem is the disease of procrastination. We all know someone who has suffered from this painful and embarrassing malady. Yet in spite of this fact, we are near unanimous in besetting its sufferers with disapproval and disdain. This shows in how disgracefully we treat procrastinators. Procrastinators always get the worst seats in football games and cinemas, suffer painful late fees, and get terrible parking spaces. Wives nag them, bosses reprimand them, and the IRS audits them. And yet, as procrastinators surely know, in an inner agony few share, that they really couldn't help it.

But there is hope. Last year, the late congressional representative I.B. Tardy authored a bill to set aside ten percent of parking spaces, concert tickets, and Pokemon trading cards for procrastinators. It looks certain to pass, as soon of course as congress gets to it. But we can do our own part as well in confronting this dread disease. As researchers close in on the genetic cause of procrastination, we can take steps now to reduce the wall of prejudice and misunderstanding that separates procrastinators from the more timely among us. If all us, just once a day, gave an extra ten minutes to those who ask for it, it would sooth the suffering that procrastinators endure as the struggle to be on time.

We have to act now, or at least tomorrow. For as the saying goes, it's better late than never.

Dana Valangio: A Valuable Life

Yesterday, our fellow Benadryl employee Dana Valangio caught her skirt on the print tray on a Hewlett-Packwad printer, and was collated to death. In her short 20 years of existence, Dana did little more than take up a parking space, and fill the day with vapid yakking. But life is what we make of it, but all of the things that had to be made to make you. For, if you don't have a personal impact, at least you have an environmental one. And that's a legacy that we shall all share. But what gave her life value? It is what the world has invested in her. In her lifetime, Dana consumed enough newsprint, diapers, and tasteless furniture to denude a patch of rain forest the size of Rhode Island. Her passion for lucky dogs, chicken nuggets, and double-stack burgers caused the needful sacrifice of 3500 pigs, 4200 cows, and 12000 chickens, and her obsession with watching teen soap docu-dramas helped keep our vapid pop culture vibrant and growing. So as we bemoan the sunk cost of an unfulfilled life, we are nonetheless inspired by the fact that Dana made a mark in reducing

species, global warming, deforestation, and in perpetuating bad taste. Dana, and the millions like her, will leave an environmental and social impact that will never be forgotten.

True Love

Harry Lupton was in love with pretty, pretty, pretty, pretty, Peggy Sue. He had the looks, he had the brains, he had the style, but unfortunately he did not have the cash.

So Harry worked hard, and collected accolades as a classical pianist, skate board champion, and Pokemon grand master.

But unfortunately, he did not have the cash.

So Harry worked hard, and soon learned how to sing Grand Opera, cook gourmet meals, fix broken toilets, and kill spiders.

But unfortunately, he did not have the cash.

So Harry worked hard, and found a cure for cancer, solved Fermat's last theorem, composed three symphonies, and invented a perpetual motion machine through the deft use of smoke and mirrors.

But unfortunately, he did not have the cash.

So Harry worked hard, and scraped enough money for a bouquet of flowers for his beloved Peggy Sue. As he walked up to her porch, he saw Peggy Sue in the arms of the local slaughterhouse magnate, Mel Porcine. Peggy Sue turned to Harry and said: Sorry Harry, you just don't have the cash.

The Big Game

It was the year that our school Sasquatch State joined the Big Enchilada Conference. It was our time in the sun. As coach of the SSU Turnips, we plowed through one opponent after another. Teams like Comatose State, Tiktok Tech, Wassamata U, and Vassar fell before our stunning aerial and crushing ground games. Finally, in a close match with the Springfield School for the Blind that was decided only when their field goal attempt went wide wide wide wide left, the conference championship was ours!

Now we had to prepare for the big bowl game, where our season was on the line. We had spirit and spunk, and we just knew our hard work would pay off in a stunning victory that would catapult Sasquatch State into the big time, and bring home the laurels of victory, a lucrative TV contract, and our pictures on a cereal box.

Finally, the big game arrived. I told my team to accept nothing less than victory. We burned with determination, and failure had no name. Victory was to be ours, and we saw our team as beginning a football dynasty like no other. We reveled in our glory to come, and saw ourselves as towering above all others like pigskin supermen. It was victory or death!!

Florida State pulverized us 400-0

As I've always said.

It's not winning that counts, it's rather how you play the game.

A Prayer to St. Judy

They said that nobody could sail off the summit at Pike's Peak in a papier-mâché hang glider and live to tell the tale. They said I'd have to be a hopeless case to try that. But I have a personal friend up there who looks out for folks like me. She is my heavenly protector, the blessed St. Judy,

the patron saint of hopeless cases. Every time I needed her, St. Judy has come through for me, and as I look down to the rocky valley below, I remember all those times when St. Judy answered my call.

St. Judy came through when I had the bad case of sniffles. The aspirin didn't work, but after prayer, in six days, I was healed!

I was having a hard time at the slot machine, and had lost \$20,000, but following a prayer to St. Judy, after twenty or so hours on the slots, I won \$1,000!

I could never reach the tenth level in the video game Pac-Man, but after a prayer to St. Judy, my little Pac-Man was able to munch down the secret banana orb and propel me to the next level. After 1,038 previous attempts, only St. Judy's intercession could have helped me.

But I also have to thank St. Judy for the time my team came from behind to win the big game, for that great job I have as a hamburger flipper, for the spacious slot I have at the trailer park, for the chance to live in the great town of Freezerburn, North Dakota, and for the near miss of Halley's comet some years back.

St. Judy has always come through for me, and now as I plummet to the rocky cliffs below, I know that St. Judy will intervene, and save me in the next two seconds from being utterly squashed. I just know.....

Lady Dew

Lady Dew was our inspiration, our light, and our clotheshorse. Plucked out of the Home Depot finishing school to be the consort of the Crown Prince of Listerine, she was every girls fantasy of a story book princess. We thrilled when she accepted bouquets from dignitaries, marveled when she waved to the crowd, and beamed with pride when she spoke in

complete syllables. Lady Dew was a true princess, just like the ones we remembered from Disney cartoons, and was just as colorful and deep.

She cut lots of ribbons, patted the heads of children, read forty-five word speeches to politicians, and thought about world peace. A grueling pace to be sure, but she was cruelly treated by her husband, who deserted her for the attentions of the more intellectually stimulating company of his long time mistress: Amanda the Polyethylene Love Doll.

She took comfort in the arms of Ibn Ass Ol Shazzam, Prince of the oil rich Sultanate of Yabadabadoo, and we were thrilled to see her find true love at last. Through the wonders of the printed word and telephoto lenses, we followed her as she cruised to Morocco, window shopped in Hollywood, and orbited the planet on the space station Mir. Sadly though, the fates conspired to keep her from true happiness.

While reviewing a Snak-Time dessert company assembly line on the company go-cart, she put the cart in high gear as she sped away from yet another photo-op. Tragically, she skidded into a pylon, and was ejected into a vat of pudding. She instantly congealed to death in a dreadful chocolicious and lip smacking end.

The outpouring of grief was unprecedented. Balloons and flowers and teddy bears and condolence cards festooned the gates of her castle. Under the summer sun, the whole pile soon melted into a pyramidal blob of color and goo. And now, as I make my annual pilgrimage to the Lady Dew memorial and soon to be theme park, my little daughter is naturally inspired as she points to the pile of refuse that will always remind us of the glorious princess that will live in our memories forever. "Look mom at that pile of doo doo!" I wiped a tear from my eye as I smiled at my daughter, hoping that maybe someday she too may be as lucky to be memorialized by such a pile of doo doo.

Bubba Goes to Heaven

1933

Here in Yahoo County, drought has turned the fields to dust, forcing folks to move out to the big city.

It ain't no problem of mine, but at least I said my prayers.

1942

Heard about some ruckus in Europe, and that lots of folks are volunteering to get in the fight.

Just mindin' my own business, but at least I kept the faith.

1969

I was told that man had landed on the moon, and heard of computers and lasers and theories of the universe.

Don't concern me much, but at least I read the holy words.

2001 and beyond

And now that I've made it to the green pastures of Heaven, as I amble towards a shady tree while I chew my cud, I am happy, and am without a thought of the world.

A Brave New World

They said I was fat

But now I know that I have the disease of obesity. So everyone knows better, and now the law requires that they build for me on-ramps and big seats, and they all look past my corpulence to see my inner beauty.

They said I had bad taste because I liked televised wrestling, grunge rock, and Gilligan's Island.

But I've got the Emmy, TV Guide, and Peoples Choice awards to vouch for my preferences, and demonstrate the good tastes of the masses.

They said I was lazy.

But it was actually my self esteem that was being damaged by unreasonable demands that I learn how to read, write, and know useless facts like where Europe was. But my self worth was held sacred, and I got my college degree anyway.

They said that folks like me will be forgotten the moment we pass away.

But I know that we are all special because we say so. And it is a brave new world that has such people in it, and I know that our kind will be the standard bearer for our culture and our future for thousands of years to come.

Uncle Bill's Knob Job

Uncle Bill got three knob jobs the other day, and the house is in an uproar. Aunt Hillary was supposed to do knob jobs, but she stopped doing even simple things like screwing years ago. I really couldn't understand the ruckus, cause the doorknobs in the house were pretty old anyway. Besides, his friend Dick Monica was accomplished in such things, and gave him knob jobs for free. Uncle Bill felt that knob jobs weren't real

carpentry, and denied that he had any wood-work done. Nonetheless, members of the house were horrified at this awful fib. How could he do other house repairs if he lied about basic things like his shiny knobs? So they all got together and tried to throw Uncle Bill out of the house. Uncle Bill complained that he still had two years to go on his rental agreement, and besides, certain members of the house had it in for him after he tried to put them under an expensive health care plan. Meanwhile, as all this was going on, all work in the house stopped, the place got dilapidated, and was invaded by red army ants. Then we got fed up and evicted all the squabbling house members. And so we thought all was right with the world, and then the house fell down.

Ely, The Little French boy

He was found all alone, unattended for a minute or two in the jungle adventure cruise at Disney World. A thoughtful worker plucked him from the jungle boat just as he approached the scary robotic hippo. He was Ok, but his parents were lost at the concession stand.

Swiftly, little Ely was put in the care of his loving fourth cousin who lived in Yahoo City, Mississippi. He was introduced to cable TV, Pokemon toys, and super-sized fast food, and he squealed with delight as he channel surfed to his hearts content. Ely soon settled down to a fun and fulfilling life of inert activity.

During all this, his relatives protested, to no avail. After all, they were from France.

So little Ely grew up American, and began to appreciate the subtle pleasures of driving sport utility vehicles, attending tractor-pulls and wrestling matches, and having intimate e-mail conversations with his friends about sports and the weather. He learned that there was no better

country than the USA, and that no other countries even existed.

The French government protested, and orchestrated massive protests. But our government stood firm. Besides, they were French.

And finally, after a speedy twenty year appeals process, the courts said he had to go back to France. In a daring daylight raid, crack commandos whisked him from his sofa, with the remote control still in his hand. The American people were saddened and aggrieved at this great injustice, and amazed as the sheer stupidity and ignorance of their government. And then, in their wisdom, they asked, But what and where is France?

A Fate worse than....

I was just reaching for my bowling ball in the upper shelf of my closet, when it rolled off and fell on my head. The next thing you know, there was Gramps with a steaming hot cup of mocha grande, uncle bubba looking strangely bovine, my cousin Frankie flapping away in his chicken outfit, and my dear deer Bambi. Hovering above them in the clouds was Lady Dew in a cumulus go-cart, and attended by cherubs dressed in Armani. Looking out into the distance, I saw a colorful landscape of flowers, windmills, and waterlillies that looked like a French impressionistic painting. But I was in no mood to be shown the Monet, as my eye moved to other delights, like that concession stand offering all you can eat barbecued chicken, pork rinds, and fried pickles, and a beckoning hammock under a shady oak tree equipped with a built in TV with a 500 channel remote. Of course, life was not all eating, napping, and channel surfing. There was work to do, and I dove in to my new job as team coach, doctor, and masseuse to the Swedish bikini team. Then before you knew it, I fell into a strange fog filled tunnel, and a figure clad in white beckoned to me.

The surgeon beamed as he told me that the operation was a complete success, and that my new titanium noggin would give me a new lease on life. Now I could return to my job as an assistant chicken plucker, with knowledge in fact that I have at least 50 good and productive years ahead of me, a far better fate than remaining in the coma from which he had just rescued me.

Erin Broccoli: Consumer Advocate

You know, I would have normally gone about my life as check out clerk at the local Quickie-Mart without a care in the world. But then I noticed a frightening thing happening to the kids in our town. Daily, I would see little kids, some as old as a few months suffering from sniffles, temper tantrums, and diaper wetting. Then I noticed the one hidden link that tied these mysterious symptoms together. All of the parents were buying carbonated cola products, and as I later discovered, were giving this stuff to their children!

I doggedly interviewed five families in our town, and found that all of the little children had suffered from time to time with head colds, constipation, and crankiness. This resulted in terrible family stress and sleeplessness, as parents had to forgo their beloved soap operas and game shows to attend to their squalling babies. After putting my evidence in front of the law firm Dewey, Cheatum, and Howe, we assembled a crack team of lawyers to bring

Big Cola to justice. Armed with the smoking gun of the USDA nutritional label and internal memoranda from the Betty Crocker cookbook, we discovered that cola officials years ago knew that cola could lead to weight gain, tooth decay, and a certain bloated feeling. And God knows what the long-term effects are of an exposure to carbonation. Indeed,

evidence is mounting that a build up of carbonation in the atmosphere is contributing to global warming and a melting of the polar icecaps.

After presenting our evidence to our family court in Kangaroo, Michigan, the local judge agreed with us, and awarded 50 billion dollars in damages to the afflicted citizens of our town, subject of course to our modest 99% contingency fee. But in spite of our victory, we know our fight has just begun, since Cola makers continue to market to children, export their product to helpless consumers in the third world, and bundle their insidious product with 'Happy' meals worldwide.

But of course, in our continuing struggle, I still have a few guilty pleasures. But as I take a gulp from my \$59.95 bottle of coke, I know that Big Cola is finally paying for its crime, and that there is justice for the little guy.

A Czikenfri Stake

As president of the national academy for the advocacy of Czikenfri people, I speak with a message of hope. Czikenfri have suffered from centuries of oppression, neglect, prejudice, and underexposure in TV situation comedies. Our people deserve a greater stake in America's future, and I am happy to report that we have recently made some very substantial progress.

Our lobbying efforts have resulted in many real gains. Due our national boycotts, letters to the editor, and mass whining, elite schools such as Harvard and MIT have agreed to annually enroll the top ten illiterate graduates from Czikenfri high schools. We have also raised Czikenfri awareness by renaming all interstate service roads after our late esteemed leader, Kernel Sanderz, and by creating an annual Kernel Sanderz holiday that all Americans devoutly celebrate as they romp on the beach.

We have also won cash reparations of \$1.50 apiece to all those 12th generation descendents of those Czikenfri who were ignobly shipped off to America from the principate of Slobbakia in the 17th century by evil King Popeye.

Finally, since it is well known the French have an aversion to anything Czikenfried, our people have developed an allergic reaction seeing any symbols of their hated repression. Thus, congress has passed laws barring the display of the French flag on our public facilities.

Now that we have addressed our problems by banning all jokes, innuendoes, stereotypes, and bad puns about Csikzenfri, and as we fine and imprison those who think we are a bunch of dumb clucks, we will be on the road to getting the respect we deserve.

Fishing on the Information Superhighway

It's the year 2501, and we finally got it all hooked up. It's a super-broadband world, a hyper-connected universe we live in, and I feel so fortunate!

Upon my barest whim, I can be instantaneously provided in 3D and super-surround sound all of the knowledge ever created by man. That means that all the music, all the art, all the literature, and all the science is here for me to explore and wonder.

But I'll get to that later.

I can also virtually teleport myself anywhere in the universe to meet strange alien civilizations, explore strange new worlds, and go where no man has gone before.

But I can't be bothered right now.

I can also transport myself to higher dimensional planes, visit deceased relatives, time travel to visit long dead civilizations, and pet my late dog Spot.

But I don't have the time at the moment.

In the meantime, I can indulge my interest in what is truly important to me: bass fishing! I've configured my information portal to receive 500 bass fishing TV channels, 12 all bass radio feeds, 7 bass chat rooms, and a virtual lake full of infinite fish. But I'm not alone in my joy. All over the world, folks are setting up individual information portals that allow them to indulge in their own needful obsessions, like soap operas, cookie jar collections, and foot fetishes. Thanks to the universal information super-highway, we can all focus on the things we know are important to us. As for the rest, I am sure we will all still spare a minute or two, but we'll get to that later.

A National Crusade

Every day, hundreds of thousands of little children get up at six o'clock in the morning to live cruel and traumatic lives that can only end with a tragic sense of individualism and a misplaced feeling of self reliance. These poor little kids are often forced to cut the heads off chickens, shoot poor defenseless ducks, and carve up helpless pigs. Among countless other chores, they carry buckets, sweep floors, and are often up to their ankles in animal doo-doo. Living in isolated houses that are tucked away on desolate prairies, they are miles away from other children and the stimulating pulse of civilization. Heaven knows how many lives have been ruined by the pathological work ethic, Christian fundamentalism, and libertarianism that this lifestyle has wrought.

But there is hope. Aided by the American Factory Farm association, we

have convinced the Congress to increase tax subsidies and to reduce harmful environmental restrictions to international food processing conglomerates. That has empowered us to liberate these rural sweatshops. Sometime soon, we all can say with pride that we had a hand in finally ending this shameful American institution, the family farm.

Apologies are in order.

Today, as we live in a modern civilized world, it's hard to believe that our recent ancestors were so insensitive, cruel, and really mean. Recognizing this, our government will soon apologize for the dreadful and appalling actions of our ancestors of a hundred years ago. But we know that a simple 'We're sorry!' is not enough. Thus, plans are now in the works for sizable cash reparations, national holidays, monuments, and special edition postage stamps for all offended parties. We hope all this will make amends for our terrible discrimination against ugly fat bald men, our senseless slaughter of 57 trillion chickens, the extinction of the mastodon and dodo bird, and the thoughtless cancellation of Gilligan's Island midway into its fourth season. Now as our nation enters the 22rd century, we can finally complete the process of healing to remove the lingering sore of guilt, and prepare the way for our evolution to the next level of conscious: that of super-intelligent spineless jellyfish.

Don't Sweat the small
stuff, just stuff it!!

A family is a wonderful thing, but spouses, children, and parents can slowly chip away at your dignity, time, and most importantly, bank account. Small stuff adds up to being large stuff, so you need to find a strategy to tell your loved ones to 'stuff it'.

People who learn to make ordinary generic irksome stuff into small barely annoying stuff have a tremendous edge. They are more peaceful with themselves and less attached to having things a certain way. This can be particularly valuable as the antics of your family bring your world crumbling down upon your head. In general, you will feel less burdened, and this peaceful feeling can spread to other family members, who will now steer clear of that snoring lump on the couch, lest you deprive them of some small stuff, like their teeth.

Finally, people who know how to stuff the small stuff feel more patient and easygoing, have better sex lives, win more and better promotions on the job, are more likely to win Power-Ball lotteries, and when they die will go to heaven without having first to take a number.

The following strategies are designed to address some of the most common sources of aggravation, and to help you appreciate the gift of a well trained and housebroken family.

Put Feelings First

I recall that as a child, when I wrecked the furniture, scratched the car, or

indulged in other forgivable mischief, my father would take me in his arms. As his hands tightened around my neck, he would murmur gently from behind his clenched teeth: "Stuff can be replaced, and so can you!" From that pearl of wisdom, I learned how to postpone cleaning, yard work, and other errands, and all the while seem noble and unselfish.

There is a lesson somewhere to be learned in all this. You can make precious moments out of when your wife tells you about her successful shopping trip, or when your child wants to share with you his exultation and pride upon passing the seventh level in the video game ' Quake'. With a simple mechanical nod, you help them feel pride and self worth, and assist them in their development of a life of wanton materialism and video game addiction. These are memories that can last a lifetime.

But, otherwise, unless you can live with a dented car, scratched furniture, and dirty dishes, tell your loved one's to stuff it! By venting your wrath, your loved ones will soon develop their own precious memories about how its not nice to make havoc with your stuff, and will steer clear of anything that disturbs you. And as for their feelings, just remember that feelings mend at lot faster than upholstery stains.

Learn to live like kids do.

We should emulate the life affirming exuberance of little children. Children live for the moment, do what they feel, and have no regrets if they make mistakes.

We should cultivate such joyful innocence. Adults of course do have to work on it a little. It's often difficult to act without thinking of others, to be mindless about responsibility, and have no empathy for anybody or anything but yourself. In other words, it takes a little doing to revert to the

natural state of a child, and to behave, for all intents and purposes, like a little Caligula.

But it can be done! Observe your child as he or she abuses their peers or the family pet, and ignore utterly your every request. Soon you will be able to pick up their invaluable sociopathic skills, and learn to take innocent and inconsiderate pleasure in abusing your family, boss, and coworkers. It can even prepare you with new skills that you can apply to new career paths like politics or law!!

Forgive your outbursts

No matter how close you all are, sometimes you'll just lose it. You'll get angry, rant and rave, maybe even go after a family member with a chain saw. But unless you hurt someone, you only need admit that you're only human and move on.

Indeed, beating yourself up afterwards is not the solution, since there are a lot more people deserving of a good thrashing than you.

Becoming a more peaceful person, particularly in at home and with family, is a process, not a destination; unless of course your family has taken off to a destination such as your mother-in-laws, while leaving you in proud possession of a six pack of beer and the TV remote control. When you forgive your own outbursts its easier to extend the same courtesy to others, particularly when you visit them in the place where your outburst put them, namely the hospital or mental ward.

Think of your home as the Golden Gate Bridge

Like most folks, I used to get overwhelmed and frustrated about the maintenance of our home. It seemed like nothing ever got done- a bed

needed making, meals had to be prepared, and pants had to be put on one leg at a time, again and again. I kept waiting for the time when the work would be finished, but alas, I never won the lottery, my kids unfortunately didn't run off as they reached puberty, and my wife refuses to accept my narrow instinctive calling of hunter-gatherer.

Then I hear a story about how the Golden Gate Bridge had to be painted every day, and how this incessant painting caused many workers to leap off the bridge in despair, and local government to impose onerous tolls. Thinking about my responsibilities in these terms has been a tremendous relief to me. Now when I think about my wife and kids constantly badgering me for money or to do incessant chores, I can quell my ardent desire to jump off the roof. Instead of panicking when something needs to be done, I put it in perspective. So, as mildew, termites, and nagging family progressively reduce my physical and social life to a shambles, I will not panic, and keep in mind that all of these things can be addressed the first thing tomorrow.

Develop your own reset button

In every home there are warning signals that chaos is imminent. These signs, such as billowing smoke, siren alarms, shrieking cats and mates, and the stampeding noise of children are usually ignored until they interfere with your appreciation of the football game on TV. But by then it's normally too late, and you are then rudely pulled out of your Lay-z-boy into the baleful world of oven cleaning chores, lawn mowing, and little Johnny's soccer practice.

But we can use these feelings as signals to hit the reset button. So when your family gathers around you like hungry hyenas zoning in on an injured wildebeest, you take them into another room, and hit your reset

button. This button, which resembles the garage door opener, can slam them in the garage for hours at a time. As you wait for them to cool off, you can cool off with your beer as you finish your game. While you're at it you can develop a rewind, fast forward, and pause button too as you think about the good old days, about your upcoming vacation, and about that quick nap that you're going to take right now.

Read a book that takes a different position from what you hold dear.

It's always good to expand your horizon, to challenge yourself with new ideas. Sometimes we can get stuck when we revert again and again to the same old patterns of thinking. You know that those well worn and tiring rules, those boring golden rules, stop signs, and fat content labels on hot dog wrappers. These can really impede you from dynamic and liberating thinking. A quick antidote from the same old ways of thinking is to read books that take positions a bit different from those we are so familiar and complacent with.

For example, I read the other day a book written by an obscure Austrian house painter. I learned some marvelous new things, such as how people need lots of living space, and how really selfish some people are who refuse to share their ample living space with others who just need a little living room. This is particularly irksome when all you need is something small, like the Ukraine.

I also learned some interesting things about international politics and banking, and in particular about the worldwide Jewish conspiracy that threatens world peace. I also became interested in joining fun social groups where I enjoyed the camaraderie of campfire meetings at the local church or synagogue. Since then my life has changed so much for the

better, and all thanks to the courage to consider new ideas, and of course to the inspiration of mein Fuhrer!

Let someone else be right

When someone else wins an argument, it doesn't mean that you lose, since no one can really win until you say so. Settling an argument is like settling the score of a football game, except you're a referee. So when your wife declares you an utter fool, you can easily call back the argument on a technicality. Thus, by merely saying, "But I recall that it was you who said such and such", there is no way for your better half to revisit the time of the conversation to conclusively prove you are wrong. Thus, since there is no instant replay available for your past mistakes, you're pretty safe to dismiss any argument she may have.

Besides reinventing the past, another helpful strategy is to simply change the topic. For example, if one of my kids say, "You never spend any time with me." My first thought would be to respond, "Yes, I do. Wasn't it just three years ago that we went to the park?" However, this just feeds the argument. A better response is, "You're right. I'd like to spend more time together. I love you very much." As you return to watching your favorite wrestling match, you know that you have not only ended the argument before it started, but that you reinforced in your child that precious cynical attitude that will cause him to give up before he even thinks about questioning you again.

Finally, if a family member just has to be right, let them be right about something you care little or nothing about. Tell your wife that her choice of wallpaper is perfect, your child that Mohawk haircut looks fine, and your teenager that its ok to substitute a three month BA degree from Bob's Institute of Hair Care in place of a university education.

Speak Softly...and carry a big stick

If you really want someone to listen to you, soften your voice as you slowly stroke the sides of a baseball bat. You be surprised how attentive and respectful your audience will become as they notice that you mean business. As you relax your body and lower your voice, take a few practice swings. Smashing a lamp or two will communicate to your family the transitory nature of existence, and they will know and appreciate your sincerity.

You'll be surprised that similar mild mannered gestures such as holding frying pans, hammers, and assorted power tools can be perceived as a gentle portent of doom. This apocalyptic foreboding can elicit just the right 'fear of dad' that can make your family as attentive and affectionate as a warm puppy.

Ask Yourself, "Why not me."

A few years ago, I was complaining to my boss Ebenezer about how miserable and wretched my life was. Rather than sympathize with my plight, he snarled:

"Is there some reason you should be exempted from the troubles of the human race? And so what if you can't make your VISA payments? Are there not workhouses? Are there not jails? Your complaint is just a big humbug!"

He was just stating the obvious—that everyone's life is full of disasters, tragedies, and frequent indigestion. Regardless of your background,

religion, sex, credit rating, astrological sign, or sense of humor, shit happens.

Case closed.

Remember what your children really want

It's easy to say, "My children are the most important thing to me in my life", but another to ask what it is that makes you important in their own eyes. Our kids don't need our success, and they don't need our love, they need our bucks. They don't care if you are a doctor, lawyer, hooker, Mr. Rogers, or a Mafia Don. They just need the bucks, and they will pretend to love you just fine. Your willingness to give them money unconditionally will turn them into slavering sycophants with marginal social skills who have a phobic response to anything resembling working for a living.

We have only a short window of opportunity to make them into such helpless dependent creatures. Fortunately, most of us have wisely dedicated ourselves to career success to the exclusion of time wasting activities like reading to our kids, watching their soccer games, or talking to them. This frees us to earn those precious bucks that kids most dearly need. Kids just want to be at the center of our universe, and to live on the planet Bloomindaes. For the few precious years that we have them, let's make it so.

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