

AN INTELLIGENT LIFE: EPILOGUE

In one small book I have jumped from the evolution of our ancestors to the future of our children. I have tried to show that we are part of the natural order in which once only the fittest survived, and that the forces of evolution shaped and continue to shape our emotions.

To stay alive our bodies obviously need food, water, shelter and oxygen. The concepts of an intelligent life are derived from my proposal that our inner emotional life has also been shaped by the less tangible essentials of survival: belonging to a herd and the power to hold our own territory. With secure belonging comes warmth, peace and love, while pride, dignity and a sense of creativity spring from what was once the ability to hold some territory and perhaps conquer more.

Unfortunately, the same forces that push us toward survival behaviours can also prod us viciously when we miss out. Our ancestors undoubtedly suffered the fear of death if they faced rejection and a terrible fury if their hunting and mating grounds were invaded. You can be certain that if they failed in their efforts to get back to the tribe, or if their anger didn't fuel the strength to fight successfully for territory, they slipped into their version of despair, abandoning themselves to certain death.

As an adult member of a civilised society in the twenty-first century, you should not die if you are rejected or belittled. But your paleocortex--your ancient monkey brain--has no idea of the context in which you live. The possibility of forgetting what you are supposed to say in front of an audience, or even thinking about asking someone attractive to have dinner with you, can trigger the same emotion as your ancestor would have felt if his tribe rejected him and left him to the tigers. Having someone take your parking place or steal your ideas can provoke the same murderous fury as your ancestor felt when another ape moved into his patch or looked lustfully at your hairy ancestral mother.

Life really is quite simple. Every single waking act that does not look after your physical survival is devoted in one way or another to acquiring as much love and sense of belonging as possible, while simultaneously securing a robust sense of individuality, control and power. Your self-esteem is determined by how clearly defined as an individual you feel and how loved you feel for being that individual. Do this skilfully and you have a well-balanced, well filled self-esteem. It's no accident that kindness and dignity are the only real measures of human worth, because these are the behaviours of love and power.

All our emotional problems are variations on our response to rejection or belittlement. There are really only three negative emotions: anxiety, anger and despair. These emotions spring from fear of death, because once upon a time to be unloved and powerless was to die. Now we are anxious if we feel we may be rejected, despairing if it finally happens and angry if we are

belittled. Sometimes if we are rejected we use anger to escape anxiety and despair.

Happiness is achievable, but not absolute happiness. There is no possibility that you live your life without pain. The best you can hope for is to make sure you cause as little of your own pain as possible. If you practise effective damage control when life has been particularly outrageous, you will still hate what is happening but you won't hate yourself.

Living an intelligent life is no more than trying to simultaneously find as much love as possible with as much dignity as possible. Care of yourself is care of your relationships. The better you do this, the better your self-esteem. The greatest happiness comes from being individually creative in the setting of love given and received.

Everybody wants to be loved. People are attracted to people with whom they feel they belong; the forces of love and liking hold a tribe together. Self-interest motivates everybody to want to like everybody else, because that increases their sense of belonging and security. This means everybody will want to like you, unless you belong to a different, totally unacceptable group or you behave in a way that makes you impossible to like. In everyday encounters with enlightened people it is quite hard to get rejected for what you really are. You are most likely to earn rejection or belittlement for the things you do in expectation of rejection or belittlement.

Because everybody wants to like everybody else if they can, there is a golden rule for comfort. Treat every other person as if you believe they like you. Do this and you will never lose. Even if you have accurately identified rejection or put down, you'll be much more comfortable if you are slow to respond. To lose friends because you have treated them as enemies is a disaster, while failing to see a genuine attack or ignoring it frustrates an enemy and gives you control because you've taken the power from the attack.

If you want to feel good, you have to choose your actions well. If you want to feel like a self-respecting, equal adult, you need to behave as one. If you manage to look as if you like yourself, you'll appear to have enough self-love to have love to spare for others. Therefore you are attractive because everybody wants to be loved.

Unfortunately, being nice is not enough; it has to be done with the power of dignity. To lean over backwards for other people is both generous and wise, but to fall over backwards is foolish. If you give more you can afford you will be looking for payback and resentful when you don't get it. In this you will be neither kind nor dignified, which will make you unattractive to others and especially to yourself.

It is misleading to say you can't love others if you don't love yourself. To love and to be loved are inseparable and they grow together. If not loving yourself denies your ability to love, it would make it almost impossible for you to be loved by another. Fortunately neither is true. You can love and you can be

loved if you don't love yourself, but you will need more self understanding and skill to do it well than someone whose self love is already established.

Children can feel good about themselves simply by being given love by their parents; as an adult it's not so easy. A poor self-esteem makes you no less hungry to give and receive love, but means you see others as less likely to love you or want your love. Your heightened expectation of rejection or put down can force you into defensiveness rather than openness, making you hostile or manipulative in the mistaken belief you are protecting yourself and serving your interests. If you do not love yourself enough, you must develop an active, reliable and reproducible system for earning love with dignity.

To live intelligently, you must recognise that it doesn't matter what you are feeling at the moment; it's what you *do* that is the major decider of the emotional outcome. Other people don't read minds; to them what you do is what you are. Thus the recipe for an intelligent life is one of positive action, not just positive thinking. Actively trying to develop a healthy self-esteem depends on the principle that the only way to change feelings is through well chosen behaviour.

You need to pit intelligently planned action and the positive responses of others against your self-doubt. Understanding that the ultimate criteria of human worth are kindness and dignity, you can script and choreograph behaviour that is attractive to you and to others. If your self-esteem has been poor but you do this consistently you can set up a conflict between an established, anti-self prejudice and your active construction of the positive.

Inconsistency is disturbing to human beings, so having incompatible experiences automatically provokes an attempt to correct the inconsistency. It is possible to feel terrible about your looks, luck, brains or circumstances, but still manage to play the role of a self-respecting adult. By doing this, your behaviour can elicit signals of respect and liking, both from others and from the people in your head--the 'they and them' who are always watching you in the form of your Observing Self. Your feelings will initially rebel against acting like this to get positive responses from other people, but by harnessing your natural discomfort with inconsistency, the gang of three can be put to work: *thoughts* driving *actions* to get *responses* that change *feelings*.

To live intelligently doesn't mean that you must or will be able to suddenly dispense with negative emotion. Not only have you no chance of getting rid of an unwanted emotion at will, you may not be able to prevent yourself from acting like a person who feels terrible. But you still need to act like a person who likes himself. You may be simulating self liking, but you are not trying to fake that you feel good, merely that while you feel terrible about what's happening you still feel good about yourself.

When their world is falling apart, people who live intelligently may be angry, anxious and profoundly sad, and their feelings may be visible, but they will still try to treat people with kindness and to conduct themselves with dignity. In short, they know that if they want to feel as good as they can when they feel

bad, they have to be particularly careful to act the role of a good friend, reliable colleague, supportive partner and loving parent. Their vanities and fears will often cause them to fall short of the mark, but by making this their basic game plan, they'll feel as good as they can and may even enjoy the process.

Unfortunately life may be simple, but it's not always easy and love won't fix everything. We want power as well, which can get in the way of love if territorial protection degenerates into aggressive invasion. In the jungle the aggressive and violent win. In a civilised society aggression is recognised as a fear of weakness and violence is forbidden, leaving assertion as the only option.

You will have disputes and disagreement, which are struggles over the territory of conflicting or incompatible truths. You can always hit the person foolish enough to disagree with you, but hitting someone only proves you're stronger, not cleverer. If you have the good sense not to be violent you can never dominate another person unless he submits. All you can do is assert yourself, which is putting yourself in your place, not him in his.

An emotionally healthy person will want power with people, but not over them. You should respect the rights of others ahead of your wishes, but never put their wishes before your rights, which is buying love at huge expense. Sadly, you'll occasionally meet people who see their wishes as being more important than your rights and you will need to deal with them as necessary.

Fortunately, people who really want to tread on you are fairly rare and much less common than people whose wishes merely compete with your wishes. In these encounters, if you are armed with effective arguing techniques you increase the chances of getting what you want. However, when you do argue it is prudent to remember you will rarely win and you may have to settle for equality. It will help guide your arguing strategy if you also bear in mind that you will always want to be liked.

That's all there is. Almost everything in this book is blindingly obvious, but people don't always see it. They see themselves in the mirror of other people, but they don't know how to change their self-image. They don't always appreciate that hoping for their feelings to change before they change their behaviour will never work. They don't see that all the wisdom and self-knowledge in the world won't make anyone feel better if it doesn't lead to an improvement in the way they behave in their relationships.

Relationships are everything. There is no emotional problem that is not a function of rejection or belittlement, real or imagined. If you understand that every contact you have with another person is driven and shaped by your need for love and individuality, and if you manage this balancing act with kindness and dignity, you will do very well.

I wish you good luck, but in an intelligent life luck becomes less important.