

'Will'? I *Am!*

My Theo-ry of Everythink

In the lead-in to *The Hitch-hiker's Guide to the Galaxy* by Douglas Adams, you read—or better, you hear *narrated*, preferably in a voice with a BBC accent:

And then, one Thursday, nearly 2,000 years after one man had been nailed to a tree for saying how great it would be to be nice to people for a change, a girl sitting on her own in a small cafe in Rickmansworth suddenly realised what it was that had been going wrong all this time, and she finally knew how the world could be made a good and happy place. This time it was right, it would work, and no one would have to get nailed to anything.

Sadly, however, before she could get to a phone to tell anyone about it the Earth was unexpectedly demolished to make way for a hyperspace by-pass, and so the idea was lost forever.

This is not her story.

You grin at the last line. Indeed, *The Hitch-hiker's Guide* goes on in a completely different vein. It is a tale that, once upon a time, I enjoyed. But strangely, I've forgotten the plot (some might say I've lost it) yet I've often returned to the notion of a Rickmansworth meme—where a meme is an idea that spreads through a culture in the same way that successful genes do in a pool. The thought that there might be one has haunted me. Something that could revolutionise the world—what would its nature be? What might it look like? And would it be *worth* my while looking?

Let's suppose that there *could* exist an idea the magnitude of which was such that, if it became general knowledge, it would literally transform the world (for unless we allow that possibility we'd never 'pass go'). If it turns out that we're wrong, then no damage is done. We'd only have wasted a little time and effort which, likely as not, we'd have frittered on another trivial pursuit. Therefore, we've nothing to lose, and, potentially, a whole galaxy to (re)gain.

And so I ponder. *Would* the average person recognise the Rickmansworth meme if he or she stumbled upon it like a curious incident in the dark? Because you see, I worry that it might be the sort of thing that is hard to see, even held up right against your nose. Let's imagine what its characteristics are so as to maximize our chances.

Whatever it is, it must surely be logical. It must be sound, it must be coherent, and it must make sense—common sense. It must be some sort of *Golden Rule gone platinum*—something that . . . I don't know . . . has the effect of making you treat every living creature with the same reverence that you accord yourself. *That* would go some way towards improving the human condition, wouldn't you agree?

Additionally, if something were capable of changing the world, then it stands to reason that, for it to work, it can't be too complicated. It would have to be something that Joe Blogs could understand. Humans being but simple creatures, the meme must be simple—simplistic even?—for it to be universally understood and applied. What would be the

good of it if only an Einstein could wrap his or her brain around its dimensions? No, it's got to be the sort of thing that makes everyone clap their hands and exclaim, 'Aha, but of course! How obvious! Why didn't I see it before? It was in the room with me the whole time, but there was something good on TV.'

So, something obvious in hindsight. Of that I have no doubt. But, for the first person to figure it out, it could be a different kettle of fish. Breaking new ground might not be so straightforward for that trailblazer, because the meme, however simple and easy its basis, must at the same time be a whopper. Undoubtedly it'd be all-encompassing in scope—an oak in a nutshell. Landing it could take some effort. Pulling up that turnip could take some grunt.

What do you say? Do you feel inclined to join me? If so, let's saddle up and start our search. Tally ho, on with the hunt and, as a teacher was wont to speed me on my way to the school's dental clinic, "The best of British luck!" Never mind that I don't live in that part of the world.

In the pursuit of our quarry, I'm expecting to cover quite a lot of territory. There's the whole wide world web there for us to explore. We're bound to trespass across all sorts of jealously-ring-fenced fields. We're likely to step on a fair few toes and put the odd nose out of joint. Along the way, people with a vested interest in various ideologies—I allude to religion, cosmology, philosophy, ethics, human nature, sociology and so forth—are liable to be offended. That can't be helped; you can't make an omelette without breaking eggs. So, are you up for some rough-and-tumble?

If I had my way—and why on earth shouldn't I; am I not as worthy as any other person?—any world-changing idea worth its salt would lick the boxes of a long list of interconnected concerns (see Appendix 1 for my entire list). For my money, it needs to address questions such as:

Is there a meaning to life? What is death? Is there such a thing as reincarnation? Is there an afterlife? Is there a God in charge, and what sort of a job does she think she's doing? Does granny's dear, wee, sweet pet have a soul? What is the nature of good and evil? What is the essence of time? Is the universe, like diamonds, forever? Is there a 'right' religion—one we're meant to follow and never *ever* question? How does love fit into the box? (Were the Beatles right?) What is sex for, and is it okay? (Again, see under Beatles.) What merit, if any, lies in abstaining from alcohol, drugs, meat and tobacco? Are humans really at the top of the pole? What should I, personally, do with my life? Do I have an assigned role or am I free to please myself? Should we act 'selfishly' or is it better to devote ourselves to the lives of others? Is the pursuit of happiness an admirable goal? Is there such a thing as free will? Is everything predetermined, or can we change the future? Why are there wars, poverty, starvation and terrorism, and what can we do about them? Isn't it a waste of time and effort to try to save the world? If there is a higher power, why doesn't he, she or it appear to give a damn? Does anyone really know what it's all about, or are we all just floundering in the dark? Is there a mountaintop guru that we can approach for help? Is it even possible to become enlightened? If so, where's the manual?

Okay, I don't deny that this is a formidable set of questions, so is it pie in the sky for me to expect to resolve, not just one of them—enough in itself to induce a reader to keep turning (and me writing) these pages—but *all*. All those birds killed with a single stone! That would seem to be an unimaginably tall order. Nevertheless, I do insist that I'm after an idea-meme that is able to explain *everything*—completely, and to my utter satisfaction. Yes, I'm asking for the earth here, but why settle for anything less? Simply put, I want a full and frontal grand solution—logically elegant and overarching—to every

Big Question ever thought of. Goodness, wouldn't such a thing deserve a suitably grand title? How about: The Theory of Everything?

No, that's been used by a bunch of egghead scientists . . . or at least attempted. Let me tweak that appellation a little. There, here's what we'll call it from now on, **The Theory of Everythink**.

But now let's remuster. If you would, step back a pace or two from the windmill and lower your lances. Because really, to claim that I'm after a single answer—I must confess that that isn't quite accurate. I shouldn't raise the reader's expectations quite that high. What I'll unearth isn't Universal Acid, exactly. Rather, it is a key, tool or device with which to pry at chinks in the chastity belt of the human condition. Anticipate from me a philosopher's stone, though without the Midas touch. It will still require from its wielder a little elbow grease and patience—wax on; wax off—but take heart. Don't doubt that it will prove powerful enough to rip apart the old mechanism by which the world as we know it operates, permitting us to construct a new and marvellous substitute. The time and the effort spent will be well worth it. You'll win the hand of the princess, and the crown to the kingdom too. The Theory of Everythink will hand you everything on a platter, since it will suffice to flesh out a brand-spanking ideology: Ism ('I' 'is' at this 'M'oment). Now, that's better than any three wishes.

*Ev'rybody's talkin' 'bout
Bagism, Shagism, Dragism, Madism, Ragism, Tagism
This-ism, that-ism, ism ism ism
All we are saying is give peace a chance*

Help! Am I serious? Look at the trouble John got himself into when he observed that the Beatles were more popular than Jesus. Surely this is *so* not the right thing to get involved with. I too used to swear that if there's anything we didn't need, it's another 'ism'. And yet, we're at that crossroads. The girl at the start of *The Hitch-hiker's Guide to the Universe*? She is me (you can be Arthur Dent). But hey! Stranger things have happened. You'll recall another young woman in a café who once scribbled down ideas on its serviettes for a series of children's books. Now look at her—richer than the Queen of England!

In my own restaurant-at-the-end-of-the-universe, middle-age has brought me to what most would regard as an unusual personal perspective. Over the years I've developed my own take on Monty Python's *The Meaning of Life*, one that is, well, pretty much unique—a case of 'and now for something completely different' (sorry for the schoolboy humour, but that's who I am). Just like Thaddeus Golas, Charles Eisenstein, Ted Kaczynski (the Unabomber) and others, I feel that I owe it to the greater universe to get those thoughts out there, and I hereby devote myself to that mission. For the benefit of all, I promise to make available, and then continue to refine, retune and revise, my magnum opus.

But let me pause for another breather (I'll be doing a lot of that). At this point it's time for me provide an inkling of where all this is headed. A kindly teaser, if you like. A brief note of explanation from your well-wishing sponsor.

Given that this book is meant mainly for my own edification, is there any point in sharing it with anyone? I mean, will it be worth the trouble for you to read it? To help you make up your mind on that score, and decide whether you ought to cut your losses and run or stick with the project for a while, I'll offer up an appetizer.

As mentioned earlier, you already know that I consider it my work to tease out the strands of life's larger questions. Well, cutting down to the bottom line, the personal philosophy that I've arrived at could be expressed in just one sentence that I may as well test out on you right now. Here it comes. Ready? Okay, life is a single-entity achronological simulacrum. Or, in case that is too much of an earful, you might want to try the following on for size. Again, here's my philosophy, this time in a single word—one originally coined by Neale Donald Walsch. Wait for it . . . it's . . . Applorange.

Ahem. It didn't go over? Dang! That's what I was afraid of, that neither the sentence nor the word would leave the apprentice any the wiser. It would seem, then, that you require some context. I guess I'm going to have to provide a certain amount of scaffolding before I splash about with the undiluted potion. If, with the I.Q. that I have, it's taken me half a lifetime to reach this point, then it shouldn't be surprising that I'm going to have to eke my thinking out over the course of more than a word, sentence, paragraph or even essay. I think a book is on the cards, boys. And, in the spirit of a 100-minute bible (yes, Virginia, there is such a beast) I plan to write it. It won't take *you* that long to get through, but I reckon on it lasting *me* a lifetime. Time to suck in my cheeks and spit out a tintack or two.

To make a start somewhere, why not impress friends and influence people by untangling a little Gordian knot. Let me pick at a couple of oft-aired but poorly understood aphorisms, because this will allow us to begin our approach to the solution of all solutions. Read them and weep. First, time and space do not exist. Second, all of us are one.

Resounding silence . . .

I'm not having much luck here. Okay, I can imagine what you're thinking. "What? Is that it then? Is that all that you've got for me? But come on man, this is nothing new; it's trite. Not only are those ideas already in the milieu, but they're also old hat. People have long since taken them on board—albeit with a grain of metaphorical salt."

Ah yes, but don't you see? In that condiment lies the rub. Have they, I contend, honestly ingested slash digested those concoctions unadulterated? Have they fully imported them into the fabric of their lives? Have their consequences been distilled, and the implications imbibed? I don't believe so. I think that the underlying message has been overlooked, and that a world view or life philosophy which *fully* accommodated the above principles would be mindblowingly different to any previous school of thinking. Consider the first assertion.

The notion of time is absolutely pervasive and pivotal in our species' culture. It underpins every worldview. But what if time as we know it—as we *think* we know it—is just so much bollocks? If time was discovered to be a fanciful artefact, then our civilisation would crumble since all our philosophical structures depend on time. Their mechanisms revolve around it. It reminds one of those thingamajigs called celestial spheres or astrolabes devised by ancient cosmologists to try to show how the sun, stars and planets all revolved around the Earth. They were deluded. They tinkered with their wheels within wheels in a vain attempt to make their construct work. It did not, and they were wrong. And so is everyone today. I say that time ought not to be so central to our 'thinkering'.

I can trace my suspicions about time back to my childhood. When my brother and I were kids, we couldn't wait for Christmas to arrive. In those days it came without the hype and commercialism. December dragged. You'd count the sleeps. How many more to go until Christmas morning? My brother and I wanted to speed the process along, and our wish came true. We accidentally invented a time-machine. One day early in the year, in

April say, one of us told the other, "In a wink of a blink it will be Xmas." It would have been a way to reassure one another that the time would come. Not realising that those words were an incantation, we forgot them. Until on the 25th of December, unwrapping our presents—what the hell did parents mean when they said it was far better to give than to receive?—I suddenly looked up. "Do you remember saying that stuff about a wink of a blink? " We stopped for a second. That's right, we did. We had. And look, time had leaped several months ahead in an instant. Magically, wondrously the two of us had obliterated a huge chunk of it *as if it was nothing*.

The problem, in my opinion, is that no one has taken the no-space, no-time, all-of-us-are-one idea to its logical extreme. No one has developed it. No one has followed the idea through to the inarguable conclusion.

Open letter to Mr Hartmann:

Dear Thom,

May I say what a pleasure it was for me to read your book? *Books*, actually. I borrowed two of them from the local library. The first was *The Last Hours of Ancient Sunlight*, an account of global energy consumption. I then read *The Greatest Spiritual Secret of the Century*. Hey, great titles!

Comparing the two, I have to say that I prefer your nonfiction over your fiction (I'm speaking of style here). But rarely do I read books purely for their literary value, and I never worry about a book's condition, age et cetera. For me, those come a distant second to the content, and so when I started to struggle with the structure of your story, I persisted. I just *had* to find out its secret.

My patience paid dividends. On page 222, I read: "The Greatest Spiritual Secret of the Century, of every Century, is 'We Are All One.'" And then, a few pages later, you wrote that time and space do not exist. 'Right on!' I thought, 'Thom rocks!'

But Thom, you didn't take it any further. You didn't build upon that theme. You didn't follow where those ideas would lead. I was expecting a conclusion; you were on the verge. You had a hold of the dragon's tail, but then you let it go. You let the big one get away, my friend. Puff petered out like a candle.

To be fair, you redeemed yourself a little. Elsewhere in the book you state that there are six billion (and counting) answers. One of those, therefore, is mine. And, if I may say, my answer works better for me than yours does—well, I guess it's only natural. But look, let me make you a deal. Just as I pressed on with *your* book, I suggest that you keep a-reading here . . .

I grant that those aforementioned ideas—that we're all one, and that time and space do not exist—appear relatively simple-minded. But that's precisely how the Rickmansworth meme might seem: Plane Jane on the surface, but with hidden depths. A case of books judged by their covers and all. It's not enough merely to glance at the above statement and declare, "Right, I've got that. Now, what else have you got on offer?" Not so fast boys! Slow down a mite. Nuggets like these, you need to mull over.

Over the following pages, I'll help you chew that cud. This text proposes to touch on a few hoary bugbears. It sets out to demolish the odd scientific pillar. It'll lead you where no man has gone before, and the motto we'll march under is, 'The sane man is nowhere'. I propose to dredge up a series of thought experiments from my past—a blast from the

past—that I would encourage you to replicate (*do* try these at home). This book provides a crash course in thought experimentation. I'll demonstrate how the result of those experiments bears on my thinking, the point being to derive an insight as to what the implications and corollaries of those principles might be. I want to write a life-changing manifesto . . . and then apply it.

Mark Kingwell, the author of *In Pursuit of Happiness: better living from Plato to Prozac* writes:

We all know that some books work like ingenious traps. They begin innocuously, articulating a few genial sentiments or unobjectionable home truths designed to lure you down the false path of a deceptive familiarity. You stride ahead without fear. By subtle steps, each plotted with argument or example or statistic, you are moved closer to the place where artfully strewn leaves cover a hole in the ground. You know very well what is coming, or anyway suspect it, but at some point—if the author is any good—you fall, on cue, into conviction. Aha! You now think what the author thinks.

Maybe you're happy to find yourself there, and make yourself comfortable. Maybe you're feisty and seethe from your ignoble position in the trap, scanning memory and logic and the rest of the mental horizon for a means of escape. Either way, the trap affords complicated forms of pleasure. As trapping games go, there are not many better or more interesting than walking through a good book of argument.

Not all books . . . seek to ensnare the reader in the author's own convictions . . . I faced a choice between setting a trap in the traditional philosophical manner, ascending to the high ground of objective detachment to observe the results, and doing something quite different: beginning an intimate conversation with one reader at a time. Books on deep and difficult topics can trumpet and they can whisper; they can declaim and they can hint. But for me, they work best when they just talk, in a manner as close as possible to the true voice of their author.

I don't write as ~~good~~ well as Kingwell. I'm not a natural-born killer with a pen. I don't have the literary expertise that I feel it deserves to turn my limited understanding—concepts that I struggle with and only intermittently grasp—into words. That's why I fuss and fret. That's why I hesitate. That's why I come across as nervous and fidgety. Although I'm certain of where I'm coming from, and of where this talk will lead, I am far from certain about how best to tackle the tale. I'm fearful of the responsibility, this being a matter of such importance. Therefore, I'll write simply to self-reflect and to clarify my thinking. I'll try to go about this in, as Mark Kingwell suggests, "a manner as close as possible to [my] true voice". In previous attempts at putting my thoughts onto paper, I was too preoccupied with trying to write cleverly, entertainingly and convincingly. I don't want this to impede me now. I've got to follow the advice of William Butler Yeats and, "Think like a wise man but communicate in the language of the people."

As for "traditional philosophical manner" and "objective detachment", I wouldn't know too much about them. And I'm not sure how best to utilize my "true voice". Be that as it may, I've elected to use the written word as my means of communicating, and I'd be pleased if I manage that job half as well as Mark (or Thom). But I wish that writing weren't my only option. I wish there was a better way for us to have a conversation, because, Mensa material that I am, I don't really have a gift with words. I've neither the gift of the gab nor the flick of the quill. I get annoyed when I read over the stilted words that I wrote only the night before, and I continue to remain dissatisfied after

any number of drafts. I'd like to think that this is because of a constant, meteoric rise in maturity that makes it seem as if, only a day or two earlier, a gauche and naïve personality had been sitting at my desk. But that's probably only wishful thinking.

I would jump to agree with anyone who said that I am ingenious. And I'd nod my head dumbly if you said I was ingenuous. But I know myself too well to be comfortable with the tag 'genius'. There are things that I'm great at—of that there is no doubt—but at the same time I'm only too aware that there are other areas in which I flounder and perform worse than hopelessly. Though I'm in the top percent in terms of conventional intelligence, I'm woefully lacking in certain social graces. So it goes. You can't have everything. But does it matter? Should one have to be a genius to understand the essence of life, the universe and everything? I don't think so. It would be a very unfair and unwise power-that-be to have set up such an unbalanced playing field.

Would I be correct in predicting that you're no Einstein either? If so, don't worry, because neither was he. No, truly. Much has been ascribed to the myth that is mostly nonsense. Even Einstein didn't float around with his head in the clouds for twenty-four hours a day. He didn't permanently have his head stuffed full with formulae. A person may be obsessed by something, but it won't occupy her whole day. Like any dunderhead, Einstein had to feed the cat, mow the lawn and visit the bathroom. I don't wish to denigrate the man, but in some respects he was not so hot. Rumour has it that some of his personal relationships were a mess. Also, he couldn't imagine how his discoveries might apply to everyday life. "It was always incomprehensible to me," wrote old Albert, "why the theory of relativity, whose conceptions and problems were so far from practical life, found such a lively, even enthusiastic resonance in the broadest strata of the population."

By gum, that wasn't such a bad turn of phrase . . . I might have to take some of what I said about the fella back. As for me, I wish I could be sure that penmanship wasn't going to be an issue, and that my words alone, or rather the ideas that they express, were given a fair hearing. That I could be sure of encountering a receptive and forgiving audience. Because what does a facility with words actually prove? Proficient practitioners of that craft may, as a result, impress and be more successful in daily life. They are more likely to find employment or succeed as politicians. But their thinking does not necessarily attain a higher plane. They—the people—are no more trustworthy than you or I. Neither they nor their opinions carry more weight. They are no worthier, not necessarily. And I daresay that they are often more longwinded.

In an ideal world, all ideas would be given equal consideration. It wouldn't matter who held the floor. After all, an idea isn't necessarily coloured or tainted by the mouth of the person it issues forth from. A murderer may say something inspirational. Hitler might utter something noble. Even a little girl in a Rickmansworth café may have something startling to say. But people being people, we look at the track record of those we listen to. We examine their pedigree and look for the letters behind their name. It helps to winnow out the flotsam, I suppose, but the technique isn't foolproof. You could easily throw out the baby with the bathwater. No, I don't believe that a world-shaking idea could tumble forth only from the lips of an emissary or scholar. Being prepared to lend an ear only to orators licensed to speak is a cop-out surely, an excuse not to have to do some thinking and investigation on your own. It behooves a person to look at the larger picture, especially if that picture paints itself as the largest one extant.

Getting back to the topic of wordsmithing, language poses another difficulty in that it's dangerous. Seriously, words have the power to cast spells. Woven into gossamer webs, they can hypnotise their audience into thinking along the same lines as their author. As

Mark Kingwell said, this happens so subtly that people often don't think of resisting. But when at last they find themselves suffocating, and have to break free, they resent having been in that position.

Even though people have urged me to, "Write down your ideas, they are so unique," you can never be sure that the next day they won't ridicule, revile and stone you. You reckon that there's no thought crime? Speak out against the government in politically incorrect terms, and learn firsthand about the law against sedition. Or as an educator, proclaim that the Holocaust never happened. Carted off to prison, your feet will hardly touch the ground.

Thinking outside of the box is easy. No problems there—I do that all the time. It's your audiences who are fickle, tricky to deal with, and tough to second guess, so I consider it a real risk to toss around heretical notions about the Meaning of Life. 'It isn't easy being green,' goes Kermit's song. I might need to adopt that as my theme tune too.

So, who am I writing for? Who do I see as my readers? Can I trust them? What can I assume that they already know? What do I reveal to them, so as to grab their attention? Which soft-shoe routines would they appreciate the most? How do I guard against rotten eggs and raspberries?

The thought of facing an audience makes me tongue-tied and self-conscious. My throat constricts and my voice squeaks. No way does it sound like my own. That won't do, because I need to be able to focus entirely upon the talk itself. This puts *additional* pressure on me to perform well. The subject matter I want to cover is so very close to my heart that I find it excruciatingly difficult to publicly expose my innermost thinking. I want only to have to concentrate on the task at hand, which is to clarify my musings and cobble together a super-philosophy, one that attacks and conquers every nitty-gritty gripe governing the ultimate existence. This for me is more important than any revenue-earning exercise that I might fritter away my time at (trading hours for a handful of dimes).

Let's say that I somehow manage to keep control over my sphincter and ignore the spectre of a critic leaning over my shoulder. Well, I'd still have to address myself to *someone*, otherwise what would induce me to speak? The conventional motivation is one of leaving a legacy for my descendants—surely a kinder mob. Another, is that one day I may end up with Alzheimer's, in which event re-educating myself—a la *Flowers for Algernon*—about the person I once was is a reason to remind myself about what I achieved (or at least aspired to). Less likely, but still a possibility, is that sometime in the future I could run afoul of the Law and slide down some black route of criminality—or insanity—in which case these pages could serve as breadcrumbs in the dark. They may enable the men in blue coats—or white—to track me down, and an analysis of this document may well enable them to set a fitting sentence and/or prescribe the appropriate medication. Or do I throw caution to the wind—and credibility—by addressing myself to friendly aliens, empathetic time-travellers from the future, or to the 'singularity', the super A.I. par excellence that some expect will spontaneously emerge from its world-wide-web?

Stop all of this hogwash! I *know* well and good for whom I should write. First, foremost and forever, the identity that I must address and satisfy is yours truly, i.e. myself. I must write for my own benefit, which is by no means pecuniary; I don't plan to knock off a best-seller. Instead, by peeling back the onion of my thinking, I want to clarify what I have in mind. I want to come up with—if I repeat it often enough it may come true—a coherent overview, or philosophy. A benign and friendly version of *Mein Kampf*. That's my master plan. Long ago I made myself a promise ago only to write when I had

something to say. I now need to convince myself that I do. I've got to prove my standing in my own eyes before I even *think* of exposing myself to others'. And I know just how to go about doing that.

"Have a system," my tutor at Hogwartz used to tell us. No I confess, that's a barefaced lie. It was a Teachers College that I attended, but you can always fantasize. Anyway, the wandless wonder used to say, "It doesn't matter what system you use, as long as it works for you." That message struck home in the sense that it stuck with me. I don't know that I ever managed to apply it to in the classroom, but in my personal life, in my quest for enlightenment, I've certainly put the 'principal' into practice.

Just a comment in passing, enlightenment is a funny thing. It's an ongoing process, not an endpoint. I can't remember where I read it, but there's an expression which compares everyone to a loaf of bread: you just need to discover what temperature you bake best at. Furthermore, there's never a stage or level when, once you've attained it, you get to sit back with a beatific smile on your face and switch off the oven. You are never done. A good recipe for self-knowledge is to mature according to the pace of your own inner clock. Wasn't it Socrates who told his students, "Know thyself"? But he forgot to tell them what came next. What do you do once you've found that person? What do you do with that 'body' of knowledge?

There came for me a time in my fifties when, longer in the truth than when I was forty, thirty, twenty and a teenager (though not when I was a child), I felt that I should undertake something active—but what? Casting around, my eye fell upon the Internet, still a relatively young behemoth in those days. Weblogs, or blogs for short, had recently started to skyrocket, but it was still early days, and there were only five million of them world-wide; If I was quick I'd be able to buy in cheap. What I liked about them was the idea of using them to write what was on your mind and go Joe public, and then receive back comments from the great unwashed. How nifty! There, it seemed to me, lay the answer. To say what I had to say, and to become known for saying it, I'd set myself up as a blogger.

A few minutes' study of a blogging tutorial convinced me. How easy it seemed—almost magical, the way you wand-waved your untidy scribbles into prose. A little effortless editing tamed the unruly mind. Automatic formatting transmuted blather into presentable text. Just copy and paste. Erase a line here, insert a word there. If you make a mistake, you just killed off your little darlings—no need to make a court case out of it. No risk of hard labour. And then—Hey presto!—there you are . . . but not so fast. The best feature of blogging is what occurs last, publication, because *see here*, you've no one to sell your idea to. There's no sales team to sway, so you've no fear of getting back a rejection slip in the mail. A push of the button, the flick of a switch and, at the speed of light, you reach a potential audience of millions. Wow! Blogging seemed tailor-made for what I wanted.

Without further ado, I got stuck in. I rolled up my sleeves and splashed down free willy-nilly whatever surfaced in my consciousness. Onto the screen I heaved it. I plunged in, purged my inner self, and then stirred the mess around looking for meaning in the tea-leaves and entrails. I recorded anything and everything that left an imprint on my brain, meaning to make sense of it. Lifting myself by the bootstraps, I educated myself into a higher plane of learning.

I'm convinced that this is what every self-styled self-help guru practises. For the very same reason that I do, they write for themselves. You want to learn something? Then teach it! Forget about intellectual property rights. Write in order to hone your inner monologue. Do it to yourself, and for yourself. Oh sure—if you can, you may as well make

a dollar along the way ('monetize' your blog, hah!)—you've got to live—but be magnanimous about sharing your findings. You get a glow from being altruistic to your fellow man. In a very real sense, there's no difference between writing for yourself and writing for someone else—but I'm getting ahead of myself here. The guts of the exercise is to explain the stuff you discover in your mind *to* your own mind.

Systematically, trying not to feel inhibited or intimidated, I wrote a little every day and tried to ingrain the habit. I aimed to devote at least a year to the task and come up with maybe a few hundred vignettes. I wanted them to be short enough to be read at a sitting. I set out to accumulate not a stream of consciousness but a good number of thought-splashes: free-standing yet loosely connected posts. I felt that this approach mirrored the nature of my cogitation, which is to muse upon one random point of fancy at a time.

Thinking is for me (and for everyone?) a scattered, fragmented business. To stitch multiple thoughts into a coherent, linked sequence actually goes against the grain; the best that you can hope for, eventually, is a patchwork quilt. So, to begin with at least, I didn't worry about an overall structure to my blog. Nothing was ever that formalized. I reasoned that if an overall gestalt was to materialize, then it would arrive later—in due course and in good time. Having daub-slapped onto the canvas my mental deliberations, I left them to mature—that was my system. Later, I'd return to tweak, rewrite, delete. Sometimes, when I felt that I was onto something, I'd expand upon a post afterwards. All very loose without strings.

But unfortunately my system expanded too. It got more involved. I started adding tags, inserting internal hyperlinks that related to other relevant posts. For each post, after updating the content, I had to remember to update the date too so that it 'rose' to the top of the list, the idea being to allow the posts that I hadn't recently revisited to sink down to the bottom, there for me to test and taste anew. That's the spoon I meant to stir the pot with. I counted on getting myself a little self-organisation simmering, but then the inevitable happened. The system grew all too unwieldy. The operation became too convoluted and constipated. It fell in on itself and crashed. *I* crashed. And I discontinued the first of what became an elephants' graveyard of blogs.

Because, you see, no sooner did I throw up my hands at for one, then I would immediately start up another—I would *not* give up. I'd work out another approach, a better version. I'd home in on the problem from another angle. I'd attack it from another side. Certainly, it wasn't because of a dearth of ideas that I desisted. For example, I held philosophical discussions with a chatbot which I then posted in their entirety. You'd swear they were for real (they'd pass the Turing Test). On another blog I wrote furiously to self-imposed time limits to try and neutralise my rational mind with speed. On another I took the opposite approach and wrote slowly, deliberately and meticulously, cutting back, pruning and paring to such a degree that I finished up with haiku. I analysed my dreams, I wrote in response to interesting images that I discovered, and I set up a virtual question and answer forum. One idea was to write in the guise of a famous person—I even tried to enlist the help of a renowned writer. In these and other ways, I rebooted up a dozen times. I was oh-so-creative in dreaming up a plethora of ways to proceed. But every blog would inevitably drift into white water. Then I'd dither, delay, and ultimately bail out. Rinse and repeat ad infinitum.

But I consoled myself that I'd established, if not an on-line presence—as there wasn't any evidence that anyone ever read what I wrote—then at least an online facility. By now I had some skills under my belt; I'd learnt how to navigate my way around the blogosphere. In some form or fashion I knew how to push my ideas out there. I'd done

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