

FS News: Epistemology Edition July

Hello Amazing Newsletter Subscribers ~

It's not often that we can take the time for mental house cleaning. We walk around day after day, tripping over old assumptions that no longer serve us. Being an older person, I get exasperated when I see myself continuing to make mistakes where I should have learned lessons long ago. (Old dogs and new tricks...)

I think often about what we need to do to get a fair shake...and in this newsletter I'd like to start with thinking, since that is one of the main tools we'll use to understand our beliefs about deeply moral words like 'fair'.

Most of us have been using the word fair since we were very young, while struggling with siblings or a pet for valuable things like food. It's a word that each of us has an inner definition for...an assumption about its meaning...but is our definition the same as everyone else's? Or anyone else's?

Let's explore our 2nd largest organ and the place where we spend most of our sentient time: our brain. Maybe we can start to understand epistemology, a power tool for building 'the good life'!

But first, a quick SHOUT OUT to the DONORS whose generous and steady flow of support in stamps, envelopes and cold, hard government-cut checks is substantially supporting Fair Shake, including getting this newsletter out to you!

I'm so grateful for all of the gifts of reflections that came in this month, too. Your responses to the newsletter shape how Fair Shake grows! Thanks, also, to everyone who shared their responses to the question "Which flag do you fly?" I learned a lot about the reasons why people stand by their flags, a symbol of their deeply held values.

Once I started thinking about values, I looked around and found this interesting (highly edited) article:

DISCOVERING CORE VALUES by Scott Jeffrey ([to share: www.scottjeffrey.com/personal-core-values/](http://www.scottjeffrey.com/personal-core-values/))

Most of us don't know our values. We don't understand what's most important to us. Instead, we focus on what our society, culture, and media values.

Can you name the top 5 to 10 values that are most important to you? It's easy to speculate what you should value. But knowing and accepting what you actually value takes effort. You can find them out for yourself if you apply self-honesty, patience, and determination. Locating and naming your distinct and meaningful core values will serve you in every area of your life and work:

1. Take a deep breath and empty your mind. Remember that your conscious mind doesn't have all the answers. Create a space for new insights and revelations to emerge.

Now consider these areas as you search for your deepest values:

- 1) Peak Experiences - Consider a meaningful moment that stands out. What was happening to you? What was going on? What values were you honoring at this time?

- 2) Suppressed Values - Now, go in the opposite direction; consider a time when you got angry, frustrated, or upset. What was going on? What were you feeling? Now flip those feelings around. What value is being suppressed?

- 3) Code of Conduct - What's most important in your life? Beyond your basic human needs, what must you have in your life to experience fulfillment? Creative self-expression? A strong level of health and

vitality? A sense of excitement and adventure? Surrounded by beauty? Always learning? What are the personal values you must honor or a part of you withers?

Next, write down the values you have that arise from these considerations. See if you can group related values together to try to whittle the list down to its essence. You can consider your list when you are faced with tough decisions...and then and adjust it as you learn and change and grow.

If you would like a list of more than 200 core values, please START A NEW MESSAGE to me with CORE VALUES in the subject line and I'll send them to you!

MARK MANSON'S 3 PRINCIPLES FOR A BETTER LIFE

Principle #1: You are perfect just as you are... but you can always be better.

Principle #2: Most people aren't evil, they're just stupid. This includes ourselves.

Principle #3: A little bit of truth exists in everything; but the whole truth in nothing.

Thoughts Are Not Passing Clouds by Tom Asacker

I wonder when the idea first emerged to treat one's thoughts as passing clouds (no, Buddha didn't come up with it). Yes, clouds are an apt metaphor in that thoughts do come and go, but it misses an essential truth of the mind.

Thoughts are not pointless, haphazard occurrences to dismiss. Thoughts have intent, complex or simple. They arise from unconscious conditioning and are motivated—and are trying to motivate you—to deal with their erroneous ideas about reality.

If you have a problem falling asleep because your thoughts stubbornly replay a negative experience, it's because your thoughts believe that there is a problem to be solved. Ditto if you're obsessed with your appearance, status, wealth or relationship. Your thoughts want you to do something about it... and now!

And what exactly do your thoughts want you to do? Do they want you to work out, work more, get the promotion, or get rich? Your thoughts aren't really sure. But they do know what they don't want you to do and that's to stop listening to them, to see through the filter of identity and social conditioning and let life unfold calmly and naturally.

Your thoughts are like an overbearing parent. They will continue to advise you as long as they believe in the value of their counsel. However, if you are vigilant about your thoughts and inquire deeply into their validity and then, through your own reasoning process, decide to ignore them, they will ease off. And eventually, they'll peter out.

I know people who live with a perpetually cloudy mental world, an inner Scotland. And many have sought relief through both meditation and medication. But what they haven't done is deep and persistent interrogation, which is the ticket to awareness. Assume that your unprompted thoughts are untrue, and then search diligently for the truth.

The Buddha encouraged students to be observant of their thoughts, to keep a weather eye open. In fact, the word meditation means to ponder, to think over, to inquire deeply. And so if you really dig the cloud metaphor, then heed Buddha's advice and train yourself to be a skilled meteorologist, for as Krishnamurti wrote: "Without self-knowledge, there is no right thinking, and without right thinking, there is no foundation for the discovery of truth."

Book Review: THE HAPPINESS HYPOTHESIS: Finding Modern Truth in Ancient Wisdom
by Jonathan Haidt 2006 Wiki: Haidt poses several "Great Ideas" on happiness espoused by thinkers of the past - Plato, Buddha, Jesus, and others - and examines them in the light of contemporary psychological research, extracting lessons that still apply to our modern lives. Central to the book are the

concepts of virtue, happiness, fulfillment, and meaning. The book is easy to read and full of both stories and data. Here are a few quotes to entice you to consider reading it:

“The mind is divided, like a rider on an elephant, and the rider’s job is to serve the elephant.”

“Intuitions come first, strategic reasoning second.”

“If you want to change people’s minds, you’ve got to talk to their elephants”

“Our moral thinking is much more like a politician searching for votes than a scientist searching for truth.”

“People who devote their lives to studying something often come to believe that the object of their fascination is the key to understanding everything.”

“The most powerful force ever known on this planet is human cooperation - a force for construction and destruction.”

“Understanding the simple fact that morality differs around the world, and even within societies, is the first step toward understanding your righteous mind.”

“We should not expect individuals to produce good, open-minded, truth-seeking reasoning, particularly when self-interest or reputational concerns are in play.”

Remember, you can request books through the free books services. If you’d like a copy of that list, please START A NEW EMAIL to me with FREE BOOKS in the subject line. (I can’t reply to replies.)

INTRODUCING: PRISON VISITATION & SUPPORT

Since 1968, hundreds of volunteers from across the U.S. have been visiting people incarcerated in federal and military prisons. Not because they know them – at least, not at first - but because the volunteers want to do something to help individuals who are isolated, lonely, and far away from home.

These are volunteers with Prisoner Visitation and Support (PVS), an independent non-profit organization based in Philadelphia, PA with visitors all over the country. Before the pandemic, volunteers visited once a month, many of them for years, to listen and support people in whatever way they need it. We try to visit anyone who requests a visit, but we prioritize people who are incarcerated in special housing units, death row, and/or do not get regularly visits from family or friends.

PVS is not a religious organization, nor do we support or promote any agenda. We are neither pen pals nor romantic partners. We simply visit, talking with people about anything they would like to talk about, helping work through problems if they’d like, and being part of a connection with the outside world.

Why do our volunteers do it? At first, it’s mostly because they care about their fellow human beings, and believe it is not their place to judge others. They may have had some experience with the criminal justice system and know that prison can be a tough place, made even tougher without any support from the outside.

But after visiting, our volunteers tell us that they get as much or more out of visiting than they put in. They get to know and learn from people they would not otherwise have had the opportunity to know, and they are grateful.

“It’s been an extremely rewarding experience for me,” one of our volunteers wrote recently. “The visits remind me how much we all have in common, regardless of our past or present circumstances.”

Now that federal prisons are starting to re-open to visiting again, we’d be honored to visit with anyone who is interested. PVS visits do not count as social visits. Please write to us requesting a visit to:

Prisoner Visitation and Support, PO Box 58068, 1501 Cherry St., Philadelphia, PA 19102. We will send you a note back to let you know we received your request, and let you know if there is a visitor available to see you.

We have visitors in most, but not all, federal prisons. We are working to recruit more volunteers, and if we don't have a visitor for you right now, we'll put you on a waiting list and get to you as soon as possible.

A few more thought-provoking quotes:

"What's most important to you? Your core values determine how you answer this question. Our core values guide our behaviors, decisions, and action." - Scott Jeffrey

"Common sense is able to replace almost any degree of education, but no level of education replaces common sense." - Arthur Schopenhauer, Philosopher

"One of the saddest lessons of history is this: If we've been bamboozled long enough, we tend to reject any evidence of the bamboozle. We're no longer interested in finding out the truth. The bamboozle has captured us. It's simply too painful to acknowledge, even to ourselves, that we've been taken. Once you give a charlatan power over you, you almost never get it back." - Carl Sagan

"Luxury can be defined as having the freedom to make choices that are not fear based." - unknown

"Maturity is figuring out your values and being good at living by them." - Tim Urban

Have fun thinking! And feeling!

Ubuntu! ~ sue

LOOKING FOR RESOURCES?

Reference Service Department - Mississippi Library Commission 3881 Eastwood Dr Jackson, MS 39211

WI readers only: The Way Out: support@twout.org

FBOP readers only: Mississippi Library Commission: MLCReference@gmail.com

Fair Shake PO Box 63 Westby, WI 54667

As always, when you are released, remember to find support in your phone-gizmo:

2-1-1 Fairshake.net HelpYourselfTherapy.com FindHelp.org

Newsletters are available at FairShake.net for your family and friends to read or print.