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## **Disinhibited Thoughts #13**

On optimism...

I write this on a bad day. I sit in my back garden alone, musing over a phone-call just received from a TS mom with whom I have not talked in years. As I listened to her repeatedly compliment me I felt a hollow fraud – unworthy of any of this flattery. The awkwardness this poor woman felt once she perceived the absence of my past signature enthusiasm was, to me, a poignant display of just how challenging the last two years have been for me.

I’ve worked long and hard to become an optimist, and prefer that way of being. Optimists are good, constructive, healthy people. Yet more often I find I am right in my scepticisms of people and situations than wrong. And I very much WANT to be wrong. I LOOK for opportunities to be ashamed of myself for underestimating others, yet can’t deny that those throughout my life who swore they would be the ones I could trust, those in whose arms I then cried in unabashed relief, were the people who hurt me the most.

An established body of psychological research demonstrates that depressed people are MORE realistic than happy people – quite literally science has shown that it is the *well adjusted* who have a distorted view of the world! But is there some way to reconcile a realistic appraisal of one’s experiences with an outlook other than depression? Perhaps in doing so one discovers what true optimism really is.

Maybe true optimism is the strength to weather difficulties. Maybe it is hope. True optimism just might be an almost religious faith in the inherent goodness of others despite the crush of daily reality. If this is true, then the Real McCoy is not to be found in an armchair – it is not a brittle bubble unable to withstand or tolerate any jostling from contradictory input. That would be optimism by default, neither forged nor tempered for strength. That is an optimism that lashes out painfully when it finds itself jeopardized.

I tend now to actively avoid that brand of optimism. Not because I see my perceptions as somehow superior to it, and not because I resent it either. It is more because I don’t want to sully it – I feel it would be selfish of me to disturb what must be a very pleasant place to be. Perhaps I would have lived, blissfully delusional, in a similar bubble had I been born into a reality or set neurology where it was plausible to do so. Of course I would not have near the awareness and knowledge I now possess – the cornerstone of my identity, and something I would no longer trade for anything. Odd what a double-edged sword realism can be.

Perhaps for some of us optimism isn’t ever going to BE about blind positivism – selectively filtering out, denying, minimizing or otherwise eliminating negativity from our lives. We can’t. Maybe for us optimism is about continuing to get up and brushing ourselves of potential cynicism. And maybe that’s something to be really proud of.

It is now a different day. A better day – one in which I have finished my Ph.D., and one in which a wonderful new person in my life is coming to visit for the week. I have since called that very worried TS mom back to reassure her that the Duncan she knows is still there – she just caught him on a bad day. I ponder these issues again today with a fresh perspective. Am I an optimist? I think so. I just needed to get up again.

Until next time, my friends!

Duncan

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