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About the Author

The School of Life is a collective of psychologists, philosophers and writers operating under a common brand. This is an anthology of its best writings produced over the previous ten years.

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Introduction

EDUCATION

Modern societies are collectively deeply committed to education, and have in place the mechanisms needed to teach every conceivable profession and to cover every topic of enquiry. We reliably educate pilots and neurosurgeons, actuaries and dental hygienists; we offer lessons in the irregularities of the French pluperfect and textbooks on the conductive properties of metal alloys. We are not individually much cleverer than the average animal, a heron or a mole, but the knack of our species lies in our capacity to transmit our accumulated knowledge down the generations. The slowest among us can, in a few hours, pick up ideas that it took a few rare geniuses a lifetime to acquire.

Yet what is distinctive is just how selective we are about the topics we deem it possible to educate ourselves *in*. Our energies are overwhelmingly directed towards material, scientific and technical subjects – and away from psychological and emotional ones. Much anxiety surrounds the question of how good the next generation will be at maths; very little around their abilities at marriage or kindness. We devote inordinate hours to learning about tectonic plates and cloud formations, and relatively few fathoming shame and rage.

The assumption is that emotional insight might be either unnecessary or in essence unteachable, lying beyond reason or method, an unreproducible phenomenon best abandoned to individual instinct and intuition. We are left to find our own path around our unfeasibly complicated minds – a move as striking (and as wise) as suggesting that each generation should rediscover the laws of physics by themselves.

ROMANTICISM

That we think so well of untrained intuition is because (perhaps without realizing it) we are the troubled inheritors of what can be defined as a Romantic view of emotions. Starting in Europe in the eighteenth century and spreading widely and powerfully ever since, Romanticism has been deeply committed to casting doubt on the need to apply reason to emotional life, preferring to let spontaneous feelings play an unhampered role instead.

In our choice of whom to marry, Romanticism has counselled that we be guided by immediate attraction. In our working lives, we are prompted to choose our jobs by listening to our hearts. We are, above all else, urged never to think too much – lest cold reason overwhelm the wisdom of feeling.

The results of a Romantic philosophy are everywhere to see: exponential progress in the material and technological fields combined with perplexing stasis in the psychological one. We are as clever with our machines and technologies as we are simple-minded in the management of our emotions. We are, in terms of wisdom, little more advanced than the ancient Sumerians or the Picts. We have the technology of an advanced civilization balancing precariously on an emotional base that has not developed much since we dwelt in caves. We have the appetites and destructive furies of primitive primates who have come into possession of thermonuclear warheads.

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

Emotional intelligence remains a peculiar-sounding term, because we are wedded to thinking of intelligence as a unitary capacity, rather than what it actually is: a catch-all word for what is in fact a range of skills directed at a number of different challenges. There is mathematical intelligence and culinary intelligence, intelligence around literature and intelligence towards animals. What is certain is that there is no such thing as an intelligent person per se – and probably no entirely dumb one either. We are all astonishingly capable of messing up our lives, whatever the prestige of our university degrees, and are never beyond making a sincere contribution, however unorthodox our qualifications.

When we speak of emotional intelligence, we are alluding – in a humanistic rather than scientific way – to whether someone understands key components of emotional functioning. We are

referring to their ability to introspect and communicate, to read the moods of others, to relate with patience, charity and imagination to the less edifying moments of those around them. The emotionally intelligent person knows that love is a skill, not a feeling, and will require trust, vulnerability, generosity, humour, sexual understanding and selective resignation. The emotionally intelligent person awards themselves the time to determine what gives their working life meaning and has the confidence and tenacity to try to find an accommodation between their inner priorities and the demands of the world. The emotionally intelligent person knows how to hope and be grateful, while remaining steadfast before the essentially tragic structure of existence. The emotionally intelligent person knows that they will only ever be mentally healthy in a few areas and at certain moments, but is committed to fathoming their inadequacies and warning others of them in good time, with apology and charm.

Sustained shortfalls in emotional intelligence are, sadly, no minor matter. There are few catastrophes, in our own lives or in those of nations, that do not ultimately have their origins in emotional ignorance.

SECULARIZATION

For most of human history, emotional intelligence was – broadly – in the hands of religions. It was they that talked with greatest authority about ethics, meaning, community and purpose. It was they that offered to instruct us in how to live, love and die well. Religions were natural points of reference at times of personal crisis; in agony, one generally called first for the priest.

When belief went into decline in north-western Europe in the middle of the nineteenth century, many commentators wondered where humanity would – in an increasingly secular future – find the guidance that religions had once provided. Where would ethical counsel come from? How would self-understanding be achieved? What would determine our sense of purpose? To whom would we turn in despair?

One answer – hesitantly and then increasingly boldly articulated – came to the fore: culture. *Culture could replace scripture*. There was, it was proposed, a convincing set of substitutes for the teachings of the faiths within the canon of culture. The plays of

Sophocles and Racine, the paintings of Botticelli and Rembrandt, the literature of Goethe and Baudelaire, the philosophy of Plato and Schopenhauer, the musical compositions of Liszt and Wagner: these would provide the raw material from which an adequate replacement for the guidance and consolation of the faiths could be formulated.

With this idea in mind, an unparalleled investment in culture followed in many ever-less faithful nations. Vast numbers of libraries, concert halls, university humanities departments and museums were constructed around the world with the conscious intention of filling the chasm left by religion.

Lest we miss the point, in 1854 the designers of the British Museum's new Reading Room specified that its vast central dome should have precisely the same circumference as St Peter's in Rome.

When commissioning its new national museum in the 1870s, the Netherlands entrusted the task to the foremost church architect of the day, Pierre Cuypers, whose Rijksmuseum was indistinguishable from a place of worship. Museums were – as the rallying crying put it – to be our new cathedrals.

That culture might replace scripture remains a theoretically intriguing and emotionally deeply compelling concept. And yet it has, to all intents and purposes, been entirely ignored. Culture has *not* in any way replaced scripture. Our museums are not our new cathedrals. They are smart filing cabinets for the art of the past. Our libraries are not our homes for the soul. They are architectural encyclopedias. And if we were to show up at any university humanities department in urgent search of purpose and meaning, or were to break down in a museum gallery in a quest for forgiveness or charity, we would be swiftly removed and possibly handed over to psychiatric authorities. The intensity of need and the emotional craving that religions once willingly engaged with have not been thought acceptable within the contemporary cultural realm. The implication is that any moderately educated and sensible person already knows how to manage the business of living and dying well enough – without the need for a nanny.

Those who have produced culture may have sought to transform and inspire us; those who guard and interpret it have restricted themselves to a sober and curatorial interpretation of its function.

No wonder we might still be casting around for ways to arrange our minds in the wake of religion's ebb.

SELF-HELP

It is notable that, within the upper echelons of culture, there is no genre more maligned or discredited than self-help. The entire self-help category has become synonymous with sentimentality, idiocy and hucksterism.

To go by many of its examples, this caustic verdict is not especially unfair. The book covers are frequently garish and the promises overblown. But to dismiss the idea that underpins self-help – that one might at points stand in urgent need of solace and emotional education – seems an austerely perverse prejudice.

Ancient Greek and Roman culture recognized and honoured our needs with greater dignity. The noblest minds – Aristotle, Epicurus, Cicero, Seneca and Marcus Aurelius – all turned their hands to what were unmistakably works of self-help. The applied philosophical tradition in which they operated continued beyond the fall of Rome. Michel de Montaigne's *Essays* (1580) amounted to a practical compendium of advice on helping us to know our fickle

minds, find purpose, connect meaningfully with others and achieve intervals of composure and acceptance. Marcel Proust's *In Search of Lost Time* (1913) was, with equally practical ambition, a self-help book intent on delineating the most sincere and intelligent way that we might stop squandering and start to appreciate our too brief lives.

The problem should not, therefore, be assumed to lie with the idea of self-help per se, only with the manner in which the genre has, in modern times, been interpreted and explored. In reality, there could be few more serious tasks for any literary work than guiding and consoling us and weakening the hold that confusion and error have on us.

Progress towards a better kind of self-help depends on reviewing the potential of a widely debased genre, and in keeping faith with the essential seriousness of the project of emotional education.

SELF-DEVELOPMENT

As children, when someone asked our age, we might have said, 'I'm four', and added, with great solemnity, 'and a half'. We didn't want anyone to think we were only four. We had travelled so far in those few months, but then again we were modest enough to sense that the huge dignity of turning five was still quite far away. In other words, as children, we were hugely conscious of the rapidity and intensity of human development and wanted clearly to signal to others and ourselves what dramatic metamorphoses we might undergo in the course of our ordinary days and nights.

It would nowadays sound comic or a touch mad for an adult to say proudly, 'I'm twenty-five and a half' or 'forty-one and three-quarters' – because, without particularly noticing, we've drifted away from the notion that adults, too, are capable of evolutions.

Once we're past eighteen or so, our progress is still monitored but it is envisaged in different terms: it is cast in the language of material and professional advancement. The focus is on what grades have been achieved, what career has been chosen and what progress has been made in the corporate hierarchy. Development becomes largely synonymous with promotion.

But emotional growth still continues. There won't be a simple outward measure: we're no taller, we've not boosted our seniority

at work and we've received no new title to confirm our matriculation to the world. Yet there have been changes nevertheless. We may, over two sleepless nights, have entirely rethought our attitude to envy or come to an important insight about the way we behave when someone compliments us. We may have made a momentous step in self-forgiveness or resolved one of the riddles of a romantic relationship.

These quiet but very real milestones don't get marked. We're not given a cake or a present to mark the moment of growth. We're not congratulated by others or viewed with enhanced respect. No one cares or even knows how caring might work. But inside, privately, we might harbour a muffled hope that some of our evolutions will be properly prized.

In an ideal world, we might have in our possession maps of emotional progress against which we could plot our faltering advance towards more sustained maturity. We might conceive of our inner developments as trips around a region, each one with distinct landmarks and staging posts, and as significant in their way as the cities of Renaissance Italy or the beauty spots on the Pacific Highway – and which we might be equally proud to have reached and come to understand our way around.

AKRASIA

The contemporary education system proceeds under two assumptions about how we learn. First, it believes that *how* we are taught matters far less than *what* we are taught. What educates students is – it's believed – the soundness of certain arguments, not especially the manner of their delivery. Teaching should not rely on gloss and charm. It is not, and should never be, a branch of the entertainment industry.

Second, the education system assumes that once we understand something, it will stick in our minds for as long as we need it to. These minds are envisaged as a little like computer hard drives: unless violently knocked, they will hold on to data for the long term. This is why we might imagine that education could stop at the age of twenty-two, once the important things have been imbibed.

But an emotional education may require us to adopt two different starting points. For a start, *how* we are taught may matter inordinately, because we have ingrained tendencies to shut our ears to all the major truths about our deeper selves. Our settled impulse is to blame anyone who lays our blind spots and insufficiencies bare – unless our defences have first been adroitly and seductively appeased. In the face of critically important insights, we get distracted, proud or fidgety. We may prefer to do almost anything other than take in information that could save us.

Moreover, we forget almost everything. Our memories are sieves, not robust buckets. What seemed a convincing call to action at 8 a.m. will be nothing more than a dim recollection by midday and an indecipherable contrail in our cloudy minds by evening. Our enthusiasms and resolutions can be counted upon to fade like the stars at dawn. Nothing much sticks.

It was the philosophers of ancient Greece who first identified these problems and described the structural deficiencies of our minds with a special term. They proposed that we suffer from *akrasia*, commonly translated as 'weakness of will', a habit of not listening to what we accept should be heard and a failure to act upon what we know is right. It is because of akrasia that crucial information is frequently lodged in our minds without being active

in them and it is because of akrasia that we often both understand what we should do and resolutely omit to do it.

There are two solutions to these fragilities of mind that a successful emotional education must draw upon: the first is art, the second is ritual.

ART

We are so used to understanding the purpose of art in Romantic terms, as the fruit of individual artistic genius, that we forget that for most of history art had a plainer and more direct purpose: it was a tool of education. The point of art was to render tough or knotty lessons easier to absorb; to nudge our recalcitrant minds towards accepting ideas that we might nod along to but then ignore if they were not stated in especially varnished and graceful terms.

Christianity, for example, devoted so much attention to art (architecture, music, painting, etc.) not because it cared for beauty per se, but because it understood the power of beauty to persuade us into particular patterns of thought and habits of the heart. In fifteenth-century Florence, the teacher and scholar Marsilio Ficino set out on an explicit mission to educate his city in the truths of Christian theology. He wished, with the help of the powerful and wealthy Medici family, to teach Florence about the Christly virtues of charity and compassion, courage and dignity of spirit. But he also understood that any such lessons would be largely ineffective if they were simply articulated in workmanlike prose on the pages of a book or delivered in a monotone voice from the front of a classroom. Ideas would have to be amplified by art in order to work their way properly into our muffled intelligence.

One of Ficino's foremost protégés was Sandro Botticelli. His works may now be celebrated for their visual skill, but they were at the outset honoured for their educative power. The *Madonna of the Book* was not seeking idly to charm the eye but to impress upon viewers the value of maternal care, sacrifice and sorrowful contemplation. Expressed in blunt words, the instruction would – Ficino and Botticelli knew – have gone nowhere. It needed, in order to carry deep into our minds, the help of an azure sky, the dance of a rich gold filigree, an adorable child and an exceptionally tender maternal figure; ideas, however noble, tend to require a little help from beauty.

RITUAL

Our problem isn't just that we are in the habit of shirking important ideas. We are also prone to forget them immediately even if we have in theory given them our assent. For this, humanity invented ritual. Ritual can be defined as the structured repetition of important concepts, made resonant through the help of formal pageantry and ceremony. Ritual takes thoughts that are known but unattended and renders them active and vivid once more in our distracted minds. Unlike standard modern education, ritual doesn't aim to teach us anything new; it wants to lend compelling form to what we believe we already know. It wants to turn our theoretical allegiances into habits.

It is, not coincidentally, also religions that have been especially active in the design and propagation of rituals. It is they that have created occasions at which to tug our minds back to honouring the seasons, remembering the dead, looking inside ourselves, focusing on the passage of time, empathizing with strangers, forgiving transgressions or apologizing for misdeeds. They have put dates in our diaries to take our minds back to our most sincere commitments.

We might interpret rituals negatively, as symbols of an old-fashioned attempt to control and direct our thoughts by appointment. However, the best rituals don't so much impose upon us ideas that we are opposed to but take us back to ideas that we are in deep agreement with yet have allowed to lapse: they are an externally mandated route to inner authenticity.

In the course of secularizing our societies, we may have been too hasty in doing away with rituals. An education system alive to the wisdom of religions would perceive the role of structured lessons that constantly repeat what we know full well already – and yet so arduously and grievously forget. A good 'school' shouldn't tell us only things we've never heard of before; it should be deeply interested in rehearsing all that is theoretically known yet practically forgotten.

FIRST WORLD PROBLEMS

Part of what stops us addressing our emotional knots is a background belief that they are too small to be worth bothering with. Our will to tackle what may, in reality, destroy our lives is sapped by a background fear of being self-indulgent. A lingering puritanism kicks in at precisely the wrong moment.

But there is (sadly) nothing especially laughable about the problems unfolding in the world's richest countries. People may not starve, life expectancy is high and child mortality almost eradicated, but populations remain beleaguered. The issues are not the sob stories of the well-to-do, begging for sympathy on account of an incorrectly chilled wine, but comprise extremes of loneliness, anxiety, relationship breakdown, rage, humiliation and depression – problems that culminate in the greatest indictment of advanced societies: their exceptionally high suicide rates.

The priority of modern politics is economic growth. But humanity's struggle towards material security will only be worthwhile if we understand and find ways to attenuate the psychological afflictions that appear to continue into, and are sometimes directly fostered by, conditions of abundance. The problems of the thirty or so rich countries described as First World are the ones that the whole of our species will, according to current trajectories, be facing in 300 years' time. The issues that currently wreck people's lives in Switzerland and Norway, Australia and the Netherlands are the problems that will be rife around the globe in 2319. First World problems aren't an unnecessary oddity. They are a form of time travel. They are a glimpse into what will one day bedevil all humankind – unless we learn to view them as more than the tantrums of the spoilt.

IMPERFECTION

The single greatest enemy of contemporary satisfaction may be the belief in human perfectibility. We have been driven to collective rage through the apparently generous yet in reality devastating idea that it might be within our natural remit to be completely and enduringly happy.

For thousands of years, we knew better. We might have been superstitious and credulous, but not without limit. All substantial endeavours – marriage, child-rearing, a career, politics – were understood to be sources of distinctive and elaborate misery. Buddhism described life itself as a vale of suffering; the Greeks insisted on the tragic structure of every human project; Christianity interpreted each of us as being marked by a divine curse.

First formulated by the philosopher St Augustine in the closing days of the Roman Empire, 'original sin' generously insisted that humanity was intrinsically, rather than accidentally, flawed. That we suffer, feel lost and isolated, are racked with worry, miss our own talents, refuse love, lack empathy, sulk, obsess and hate: these are not merely personal flaws, but constitute the essence of the human animal. We are broken creatures and have been since our expulsion from Eden, damned – to use the resonant Latin phrase – by *peccatum originale*. Even without subscribing to the precise details of Augustine's logic, we can appreciate his conclusion.

This should feel not like a punishing observation, but more like relief from the pressures of 200 years of scientifically mandated faith in the possibility of progress.

There can wisely be no 'solutions', no self-help, of a kind that removes problems altogether. What we can aim for, at best, is consolation – a word tellingly lacking in glamour. To believe in consolation means giving up on cures; it means accepting that life is a hospice rather than a hospital, but one we'd like to render as comfortable, as interesting and as kind as possible.

A philosophy of consolation directs us to two important salves: understanding and companionship. Or grasping what our problem is – and knowing that we are not alone with it. Understanding does not magically remove the pain but it has the power to reduce a range of secondary aggravations and fears. At least we know what is racking us and why. Our worst fears are held in check, and tears may be turned into bitter knowledge.

It helps immensely too to know that we are in company. Despite the upbeat tone of society in general, there is solace in the discovery that everyone else is, in private, of course as bewildered and regretful as we are. This is not *Schadenfreude*, simply profound relief that we are not the only ones.

SANE INSANITY

Basic sanity should also be assumed to be beyond us. There are too many powerful reasons why we lack anything like an even keel. We have complex histories, we are heading towards the ultimate catastrophe, we are vulnerable to devastating losses, love will always leave us wanting, the gap between our hopes and our realities is always going to be unbridgeable. In the circumstances, it makes no sense to aim for sanity; we should fix instead on the goal of achieving a wise, knowledgeable and self-possessed relationship with our manifold insanities, or what can be termed 'sane insanity'.

What separates the sane insane from the simply insane is the honest, personable and accurate grasp they have on what is not entirely right with them. They may not be wholly balanced, but they don't have the additional folly of insisting on their normalcy. They can admit with good grace – and no particular loss of dignity – that they are naturally deeply peculiar at myriad points. They do

not go out of their way to hide from us what they get up to in the night, in their sad moments, when anxiety strikes, or during attacks of envy. They can – at their best – be drily funny about the tragedy of being human. They lay bare the fears, doubts, longings, desires and habits that don't belong to the story we commonly tell ourselves about who we are.

The sane insane among us are not a special category of the mentally unwell; they represent the most evolved possibility for a mature human being.

IN PRAISE OF MELANCHOLY

Melancholy is not rage or bitterness; it is a noble species of sadness that arises when we are properly open to the idea that suffering and disappointment are at the heart of human experience. It is not a disorder that needs to be cured; it is a tender-hearted, calm, dispassionate acknowledgement of how much agony we will inevitably have to travel through.

Modern society's mania is to emphasize buoyancy and cheerfulness. It wishes either to medicalize melancholy states – and therefore 'solve' them – or to deny their legitimacy altogether. Yet melancholy springs from a rightful awareness of the tragic structure of every life. We can, in melancholy states, understand without fury or sentimentality that no one truly understands anyone else, that loneliness is universal and that every life has its full measure of shame and sorrow. The melancholy know that many of the things we most want are in tragic conflict: to feel secure and yet to be free; to have money and yet not to have to be beholden to others; to be in close-knit communities and yet not to be stifled by the expectations and demands of society; to explore the world and yet to put down deep roots; to fulfil the demands of our appetites for food, sex and sloth and yet stay thin, sober, faithful and fit.

The wisdom of the melancholy attitude (as opposed to the bitter or angry one) lies in understanding that our suffering belongs to humanity in general. Melancholy is redolent with an impersonal perspective on suffering. It is filled with a soaring pity for our condition. There are melancholy landscapes and melancholy pieces of music, melancholy poems and melancholy times of day. In them, we find echoes of our own griefs, returned back to us

without some of the personal associations that, when they first struck us, made them particularly agonizing. The task of culture is to turn rage and forced jollity into melancholy. The more melancholy a culture can be, the less its individual members need to be persecuted by their own failures, lost illusions and regrets.

THE SIMPLE AND THE OBSCURE

We could expect humans to display a powerful reflex for simple over obscure explanations. Yet in many areas of intellectual and psychological life, we observe a stranger, more unexpected phenomenon: a prejudice in favour of abstruseness, density, enigma and the esoteric. Our respect for explanations that come close to incomprehensible, that provoke puzzlement, that employ uncommon words suggests an implicit belief that the truth should not come in a form that is easily fathomable. We too readily assume that we are approaching a person of genius when we stop understanding anything of what they're saying.

It is problematic, therefore, that so many of the central truths of emotional life have an elemental simplicity to them that violates our predilections for difficulty and maintains some of the innocent plainness of a parable. To hear that we should understand rather than condemn, that others are primarily anxious rather than cruel, that every strength of character we admire bears with it a weakness we must forgive: these are both key laws of psychology and entirely familiar truisms of the sort that we have been taught to disdain. Yet despite their so-called obviousness, simple-sounding emotional dynamics are aggressively capable of ruining extended periods of our lives. Three decades devoted to the unhappy pursuit of wealth and status may turn out to be driven by nothing more or less than a forgotten desire to secure the attention of a distracted parent more interested in an older sibling. The failure of a fifteen-year relationship, a thousand nights of pain and fury, might have originated in an avoidant pattern of attachment established in one's fourteenth month on earth. Emotional life is never done with showing us how much we might have to suffer for 'small' things.

We should gracefully acknowledge how much of what nourishes and guides us, how much of what we should be hearing is astonishingly, almost humiliatingly, simple in structure. We

should not compound our problems by insisting on elevated degrees of mystery, or allow our emotional intelligence to be clouded by a murkiness that would be legitimate only in the advanced sciences. Our vulnerability to basic psychological error is no more absurd, and no less poignant, than the fact that an adult can be killed by a well-aimed pebble or that we can die for want of a glass of water. Simplicity should never insult our intelligence; it should remind us to be nimble in our understanding of what intelligence comprises.

We need to be sophisticated enough not to reject a truth because it sounds like something we already know. We need to be mature enough to bend down and pick up governing ideas in their simplest guises. We need to remain open to vast truths that can be stated in the language of a child.

THE SCHOOL OF LIFE

There is a deliberate paradox in the term 'the school of life'. School is meant to teach us what we need to know to live and yet, as the phrase ruefully suggests, it is most often life – by which we really mean painful experience – that does the bulk of the instruction for us. The real institution called the School of Life therefore carries within it a hope and a provocation. It dares to believe that we might learn, in good time and systematically, what we might otherwise acquire only through many decades of stumbling. And it gently criticizes the current way we set about equipping ourselves with the skills we need to thrive.

We aren't ever done with the odd business of becoming that most extraordinary and prized of things, an emotionally mature person – or, to put it a simpler way, an almost grown-up adult. In an ideal society, it would be not only children who were known to need an education. All adults would recognize that they inevitably required continuing education of an emotional kind and would remain active followers of a psychological curriculum. Schools devoted to emotional intelligence would be open for everyone, so that children would feel that they were participating in the early stages of a lifelong process. Some classes – about anger or sulking, blame or consideration – would have seven-year-olds learning alongside fifty-five-year-olds, the two cohorts having been found

to have equivalent maturities in a given area. In such a society, the phrase 'I've finished school' would sound extremely strange.

We have collectively left to chance some of what it is most important to know; we have denied ourselves the opportunity to systematically transmit wisdom – reserving our belief in education to technical and managerial skills. The School of Life is a modest attempt to try to spare us a bit of time.

I : SELF

1 Strangers to Ourselves

THE DIFFICULTY OF SELF-KNOWLEDGE

One of our greatest challenges is to understand the peculiar content of own minds. We may look like the ultimate owners of our skulls but we remain practical strangers to too much of what unfolds within them. A casual acquaintance may, in a few minutes of conversation, deduce more about our psyches than we have been able to determine across many decades. We are frequently the very last people to know what is at work within 'us'.

We suffer because there is no easy route to introspection. We cannot open a hatch and locate 'ourselves'. We are not a fixed destination, but an eternally mobile, boundless, unfocused, vaporous spectre whose full nature can only be retrospectively deduced from painfully recollected glimpses and opaque hints. There is no time or vantage point from which to securely decode our archives of experience. There is too much data entering us at every moment for us to easily sift and arrange our sensations with the care and logic they deserve.

Symptoms of our self-ignorance abound. We are irritable or sad, guilty or furious, without any reliable sense of the origins of our discord. We destroy a relationship that might have been workable under a compulsion we cannot account for. We fail to know our professional talents in time. We pass too many of our days under mysterious clouds of despair or beset by waves of persecution.

We pay a very high price for our self-ignorance. Feelings and desires that haven't been examined linger and distribute their energy randomly across our lives. Ambition that doesn't know itself re-emerges as panic; envy transforms itself into bitterness; anger turns into rage; sadness into depression. Disavowed material buckles and strains the system. We develop pernicious tics: a facial twitch, impotence, a compulsion, an unbudgeable sadness. Much of what destroys our lives can be attributed to emotions that our

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