

A Book I'd Recommend to a Colleague

THE ORIGINS OF VIRTUE

by Matt Ridley
(Viking, 1996)

In 1858, Charles Darwin put forward the thesis that species continued to exist because they possessed qualities that ensured survival. Those that could run faster, kill better, breed with greater efficiency and deny rivals of their food source exterminated those that could not. These characteristics were not determined by circumstances or experience, but by genes which changed by chance. Species survival was, in fact, a game of biological roulette.

What comprised the chemical heart of a gene was unclear till 1962, when James Watson and Francis Crick, an off-beat pair, working in Cambridge determined the structure of DNA. It was a double helical molecule capable of replicating itself indefinitely and producing complex controlling molecules in the organism which housed it.

Shortly after this, the neo-Darwinists, led by their high-priest, Richard Dawkins, entered the picture. It was not the animal that sought survival they claimed, but the gene. All animals, including humans, were simply vehicles for carrying out the gene's purpose which was to multiply and inherit the earth. All behaviour was geared to this end.

Matt Ridley, the scientific correspondent of the *Economist*, is a neo-Darwinist. Moreover, he is an impressive scholar and an exception in that coterie: he is informative while remaining easily understandable.

It is easy to see why a gene interested only in self-propagation can make its agents ie. animals, selfish and ruthless: more difficult to explain what occasionally makes them altruistic and self-sacrificing.

Ridley provides a galaxy of information as to why virtue is a biological phenomenon designed to provide the gene with immortality. His topics range from game theory to gang-rape in dolphins, to support his thesis. All this is fascinating, but in the end, he fails to convince.

He cannot explain how the gene was benefitted by Jesus, Socrates and millions of anonymous martyrs choosing death, instead of life and continuing gene production, for what they believed in.

I state a personal view.

Human beings are ever willing to find ways of avoiding moral responsibility for the unhappiness we are party to. Karma, Kismet and the 'drift of stars' are no longer fashionable escape routes. Then the neo-Darwinists popped-up to offer us genes as an excuse for rogue behaviour. Men philander not because they

like it but because it is a way of disseminating the enormous packets of DNA they produce in each ejaculate. We kill our rivals not because we are unable to control our hatred but because it is a way of ensuring the survival of our personal genes.

However much you bestialise humans, there is one thing that makes a difference between animals and men. It is language. This, as Noam Chomsky showed in the sixties, is not learnt or acquired for the convenience of survival, but is hard-wired into every human brain.

Language gives us a concept of time, allows us to dip into the past and touch the future, makes us aware of death and able to see other human beings who share this faculty as our brothers. Above all, it gives us the ability to choose. If you ignore language, the non-genetic way of obtaining immortality, you might remember that 'in the beginning was the Word'.

DR GOPAL BARATHAM
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SEALED ORDERS

by Agnes Sanford
(Bridge Publishing, Inc, 1972)

Some years ago, I read the book, *The Healing Light*, which touched on the healing power of God. One of the passages in that book was especially meaningful to me. At that time, I had just begun my involvement in the hospice ministry. The author made the following observation which captures the spirit of my responsibilities as a doctor, especially in hospice care: "The patient has asked him to go a mile with him, and he must go two miles, up to the gates of that great Life that men call death. The last mile is a very weary mile. But all along the way there is the joy of holding one we love above suffering and pain and of freeing a spirit very gently from the ties of the flesh".

A few weeks ago, I was therefore most delighted to come across the book, *Sealed Orders* as it was the autobiography of Agnes Sanford. It provided me rich insights into the life of this well known Christian healer and author. In her words, it is a story of a searching and a seeing - a sharing of her journey in life to fulfill her "sealed orders" from God. Agnes Sanford believed that God has sent many of us into the world to heal and to carry His love to those who need Him.

In *Sealed Orders*, the author describes her early life in China where she was born in 1897 and her subsequent return to the United States after her

marriage. The book is a poignant record of a life which spans the Russo-Japanese War and the two World Wars.

Through this autobiography, I gained three important insights which are very important to me as a medical doctor. First of all, it reinforced my belief in the reality of the spiritual dimension of life. Medical doctors are trained to believe only what they can see and it is therefore very difficult to recognise the reality of spiritual forces which can only be seen when one believes. But spiritualism is a reality and from her experience, Agnes Sanford found that people can be possessed by spirits. Furthermore, she had encountered very adverse consequences when she prayed for people who had been involved in spiritualism.

Secondly, from her experiences with healing, the author demonstrates the reality of a transpersonal dimension of healing. She found to her surprise that many of her fellow missionaries do not believe that God can and does perform miracles of the healing of the body. It is therefore not surprising that many doctors find it difficult to believe in miracles.

Thirdly, I am reminded that the most effective motive for healing is compassion. With our rapidly advancing medical technology, medical care tends to become dehumanised and doctors transformed into technicians devoid of compassion. Too often, doctors in our modern world are more obsessed with the performance of a physical cure rather than the healing of their patients with a compassionate touch.

Sealed Orders is the journal of a life of a woman who has found God to be real and who was a channel of God's healing power to the sick. It is a book which I believe will help my fellow medical colleagues to become more effective healers.

DR PATRICK C W KEE
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WALDEN AND CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE (Tickner and Fields, 1854)

THE PORTABLE THOREAU (Viking Penguin, 1947)

by Henry David Thoreau

I first read the book *Walden* by Henry David Thoreau when I was a medical student. Since then I have had numerous occasions to return to Thoreau and recently re-read *Walden* with the intention of sieving out the gems in the book for this publication.

Thoreau was a transcendentalist poet-philosopher from Concord, Massachusetts and on 4 July 1845, the day of America's independence, he moved out of his parents' home to a cabin by Walden Pond to declare his own independence.

Transcendentalists at that time, were moved beyond the surface of American life - its commerce, technology, industrialism and material progress, to a realisation that those public phenomenon were insignificant when compared with an individual's spiritual life. Their primary activities were forms of

self expression rather than the social, economic or political activities then bustling in the 19th century. They discussed, wrote and lived their ideas instead of inventing machines and initiating commercial enterprises or introducing legislation.

Thoreau, like all transcendentalists, believed in desirability and necessity of cultivating one's life. Thoreau demanded that we examined our own lives before prodding around in someone else's life.

He wrote in *Walden* that if a man was coming to his house with the conscious design of doing him good, he would run for his life. He insisted that every reader of *Walden* should be very careful to find and pursue his own way. He offered his life as an example of how one could live simply and wisely. In Thoreau's mind, individual discipline, intellectual growth and spiritual development were the only true methods of reform. True reform was interior, private and wholly individual. Reforming oneself meant discovering the divinity within oneself.

Thoreau built his own cabin and lived in it by himself for two years beside Walden Pond and wrote his book, *Walden*, which contained delightful chapters on economy, reading, sounds, solitude, visitors, etc, and where he lived, how he lived and what he lived for.

For the readers' benefit, I have attempted to put together what I consider the gems of Thoreau's thoughts which I believe could be beneficial to some of us at one time or another in our lives.

In the chapter on "Where I lived", he wrote: "I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life and see if I could not, learn what it had to teach, and not, when I come to die, discover that I had not lived".

I personally cannot agree more with Thoreau. I too believe that life is short and one should live one day at a time, be grateful for it and live life to the fullest so that when time comes for one to die, one would have embraced every facet of life and experienced whatever life had to offer.

In the chapter on "Reading", he wrote: "To read well, that is to read true books in a true spirit, is a noble exercise. Books must be read deliberately and reservedly as they were written".

When I read a good book, I study it like a literature text, underline, write notes and comments, think about the contents and return to certain passages again and again. Reading and appreciating a good book is as difficult as writing one.

In Thoreau's opinion, a written work is the choicest of relics. It is something at once more intimate with us and more universal than any other work of art. It is the work of art nearest to life itself. In a similar vein, Milton the blind poet wrote that: "A good book is the precious life blood of a master spirit."

Thoreau wrote the following comments about visitors to his house, that he could always tell if visitors had called in his absence, either by the bent twigs or grass, or the print of their shoes, and generally of what sex or age or quality they were by some slight trace they had left behind, like a flower dropped or a bunch

of grass plucked and thrown away. Indeed he was frequently notified of the passage of a traveller along the highway sixty rods off by the scent of his pipe.

Here, I remember our old Professor Gordon Arthur Ransome telling us, as medical students, that we should try to emulate Sherlock Holmes when we clerk our cases - to use all our senses. In many ways, Thoreau's powers of observations were almost as good as Dr Watson's and could equal that of Somerset Maugham, a doctor who was a master short story writer and also a great observer of human nature with all its frailties. I am sure Thoreau would have made an excellent clinician. He was a Harvard graduate and like Maugham, chose not to be a clergyman but turned to writing instead.

On solitude, he wrote that he found it wholesome to be alone the greater part of the time. To be in company, even with the best, was soon wearisome and dissipating. He loved to be alone and never found the companion that was as companionable as solitude. Perhaps here I should add that Thoreau was in love twice. In his first love, his lover's father rejected his proposal of marriage and the girl subsequently married someone else. His second love was an unrequited love. It was a friend's wife who was more a sister to him.

He wrote more about society: "I had three chairs in my house. One for solitude, two for friendship, three for society. When visitors came in larger numbers there was but the third chair for them all, but they generally economised the room by standing up".

He explained that he had withdrawn so far within the great ocean of solitude, into which the rivers of society empty, that for the most part so far as his needs were concerned, only the finest sediment was deposited around him. Here I sense a tone of arrogance, but then, even a simple man can wear an air of arrogance now and again just as a beggar can have a right to dignity. But somehow I feel a little uncomfortable about Thoreau being a little arrogant. This reminds me of Socrates who once said that even a beggar can wear his dignity like a crown upon his head.

His description of Walden Pond is simple yet elegant like the man, though he could have called it Lake Walden, I could guess why he did not. He wrote that the scenery of Walden was humble, and though very beautiful, did not approach to grandeur, nor would it much concern one who had not frequented it for long or lived by its shore; yet that pond was so remarkable for its depth and purity as to merit a particular description. It was a clear and deep green well, a perennial spring in the midst of pine and oak woods.

On sensuality he wrote: "All sensuality is one, though it takes many forms; all purity is one. It is the same whether a man eats, or drinks, or cohabits or sleeps sensually. They are but one appetite and one only needs to see a person do any one of these things to know how great a sensualist he is. The impure can neither stand nor sit with purity".

I wonder about the truth of the above statement, such generalisation. Perhaps someone should examine his hypothesis.

The following statement I subscribe to: "We are all sculptors and painters, and our material is our own flesh and blood and bones. Any nobleness begins at once to refine a man's features, any meanness or sensuality to imbrute them".

Thoreau has this to say about doctors: "To the sick, the doctors wisely recommend a change of air and scenery. Our voyaging is only great circle-sailing and the doctors prescribe for diseases of the skin only".

He wrote about tradition and conformity, thus: "I left the woods for as good a reason as I went there. Perhaps it seemed to me that I had several more lives to live, and could not spare any more time for that one. It is remarkable how easily and insensibly we fall into a particular route and make a beaten track for ourselves. How worn and dusty, then, must be the highways of the world, how deep the ruts of tradition and conformity".

Thoreau was a simple and humble man. He believed that in proportion as a man simplified his life, the laws of the universe will appear less complex, and solitude will not be solitude, nor poverty, poverty, nor weakness, weakness. His famous words were: "Our lives are frittered away by details, simplify, simplify".

Thoreau has words of comfort for those amongst us who feel inferior. "A living dog is better than a dead lion. Shall a man go and hang himself because he belongs to the race of pygmies and not be the biggest pygmy that he can? Let everyone mind his own business and endeavour to be what he was made".

He added: "Why should we be in such desperate haste to succeed? If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music he hears, however measured or far away".

If you feel you have a mean life, here is his advice: "However mean your life is, do not shun it and call it hard names. It is not so bad as you are. It looks poorest when you are richest. The fault finder will find fault even in paradise. Love your life, poor as it is. You may perhaps have some pleasant, thrilling, glorious hours even in a poor house. The setting sun is reflected from the windows of the alm-house as brightly as from the rich man's abode".

On old things and new things he advised: "Do not trouble yourself much to get new things, whether clothes or friends. Turn the old; return to them. Things do not change. Sell your clothes and keep your thoughts".

On magnanimity and wealth: "It is life near the bone where it is sweetest. No man loses ever on a lower level by magnanimity on a higher. Superfluous wealth can buy superfluities only".

Thoreau's ideal was always to strive for truth: "Rather than love, than money, than fame, give me truth. I sat at a table where were rich food and wine in abundance and obsequious attendance, but sincerity and truth were not; and I went away hungry from the inhospitable board".

"They talked to me of the age of the wine and the fame of the vintage; but I thought of an older, a newer and purer wine, of a more glorious vintage, which they had not got, and could not buy".

In the last few lines of the book, he concludes beautifully: "The light which puts out our eyes is darkness to us. Only that day dawns to which we are awake. There is more day to dawn. The sun is but a morning star".

Acknowledgement: I would like to thank Dr Ho Tak Ming who introduced me to Thoreau.

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AN UNQUIET MIND, A MEMOIR OF MOODS AND MADNESS

by Kay Redfield Jamison
(Vintage Books, 1996)

Kay Redfield Jamison is Professor of Psychiatry at the Johns Hopkins School of Medicine. She is co-author of the standard medical text on manic depressive illness, chosen as the Most Outstanding Book in Biomedical Sciences by the Association of American Publishers. Perhaps its excellence in part derives from her first hand knowledge of the illness. Dr Jamison is both an expert in the field of mood disorders as well as its victim. While pursuing a career in academic medicine, she developed manic depressive illness. With this memoir, Dr Jamison candidly and brilliantly goes public with her diagnosis and a stunning description of her own experience with psychiatric illness.

This book explicitly and poetically describes her attacks of mania, depression and psychosis as well as her own problems acknowledging the need for ongoing medication. Risking the potential impact on her personal and professional life, Dr Jamison teaches us all a great lesson. As she so eloquently states, there is a profound need for a change in public perception about mental illness. Despite my own 15-year career treating psychiatric disorders, I was powerfully moved by her astonishing ability to combine descriptions of her personal life with clear and straightforward clinical expertise.

Manic depressive illness, also known as bipolar disorder, is a mood disorder with an onset in late adolescence or early adulthood. It is often familial and treatable with a number of mood stabilisers which include but are not limited to, lithium, carbamazepan, and valproic acid. As Dr Jamison indicates in her standard text on the topic, "there are strong limitations on the effective use of language to describe unusual events, such as extreme moods, gross cognitive and perceptual distortions, and both subtle and profound changes in sensory experience. Nonetheless, she manages to find the language that cannot help but startlingly convey the ecstatic, although transient feelings of mania as well as the dull, lifeless, apathy associated with depression. The author herself raises all sorts of questions about the impact of going public with her illness. Her concerns include the impact on both her personal and professional life. There is the risk of loss of privacy to her family as bipolar illness is

genetic. Would knowledge of her illness affect people's perception of who she is? Would her depressions and suicide attempt be merely seen as a sign of weakness? Would her license to practice be threatened despite having developed every conceivable contingency in the case of recurring illness? Should she be allowed to care for patients? Would her scientific writing and research now be seen as biases? Dr Jamison is the first to acknowledge that her illness has tremendously affected her teaching, advocacy work, clinic practice and self-concept. These questions which are explored in great depth, underline the stigma associated with psychiatric illness in general and certainly, with clinicians who themselves become ill. Are we brave enough to embrace our colleagues with psychiatric illness, who are determined enough and lucky enough to obtain excellent psychiatric care? Observing an expert in the field of mood disorders struggle with issues of medicine, non-compliance in her own case, is very instructive.

This book is a delight to read. It is well written, frequently humorous, and hard to put down. Its description of the depression, mania, hypomania and the psychotic process should be required reading for every clinician. This memoir is one of those rare books that has the power to transform lives - and possibly even save them.

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HANDBOOK FOR THE SOUL

edited by Richard Carlson, Benjamin Shield
(Judy Piatkus (Publishers) Ltd, 1995)

For those who yearn for a better quality life, I would highly recommend that you read *Handbook for the Soul*. It is a collection of more than thirty original essays by some of the most celebrated writers of our time. Most of them are doctors, psychiatrists and psychologists. The following are some words of wisdom I have gleaned from reading the book.

We live in a materialistic world that emphasises being economically productive. So when we talk about the soul, we get messages that something is wrong. Many people wait until they have a heart attack, or ulcers, or until they are told that they have only six months to live, to attend to their soul needs. Why wait until then?

"You know of the disease in Central Africa called Sleeping Sickness. There also exists a sleeping sickness of the soul ..." - Albert Schweitzer.

What are these soul needs? Joy, Beauty, Creativity ... Anytime we catch a glimpse of soul, beauty is there; anytime we catch our breath and feel "How beautiful!" the soul is present.

A yearning exists within the human psyche that is not supported or nurtured by our culture: the yearning for soul experiences. "The human being is pregnant with the soul" - Plato. This yearning is as much a part of us as sexual desire, and the desire

for food and shelter; repression of this yearning can be just as deadly, dangerous and destructive as repression of these other desires. There are widespread signs and symptoms throughout the world indicating that our modern culture has left something out. That "something" is the soul. People are getting all the money and possessions they want and are still questioning how to have a meaningful life.

When you connect with your soul, you will feel peace, gratitude and wonder for life; you will move to an entirely different level of life. Everyday, ordinary life will take on new meaning and richness. Experiencing the soul is like the magic you feel when falling in love. It is a time when our ego boundaries - those defensive walls we build around ourselves to keep us separate from one another - crumble. Sooner or later, experiences of the soul are connected with helping others. When we nourish the soul, we automatically nourish our capacity to love another person.

With so much overstimulation in this high-tech world, it is difficult to be connected to our souls. (We are exposed to more information in one Sunday newspaper than the average person was exposed to in an entire year in the late 1700's!) Most of the writers agree that quietness ("When the chatter stops...") and solitude are necessary for you to receive messages of the soul. It is also important to look for the larger picture; and not to miss the wood for the trees. Only then can we nurture the soul with our experiences. Only then can everything, even tragedy, be seen as a gift in disguise to nourish the soul. The nourishment and growth of the soul becomes and is the very reason for human life.

There are many ways to encourage soul growth, such as through love, nature, healing our wounds, forgiveness and selfless service. Whether we are aware of it or not, we are all on - and part of - an incredible journey of nourishing the soul. You have your own unique way of travelling on this journey. As you nourish your soul, you become kinder, more compassionate, wiser, more loving and gracious. But if you lose awareness of your soul, you will become disconnected and depressed.

"For what shall it profit a man,
if he shall gain the whole world,
and lose his own soul? Or what
shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"

- Mark 8 : 36-7.

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A MIND THAT FOUND ITSELF
by Christopher Whittingham Beers
(University of Pittsburgh Press, 1908)

People read a book for a variety of reasons. Some people read for information, some for knowledge, some for inspiration, some for its message and some for voyeuristic pleasure. Other readers enjoy a book for its story content or its literary merit. It is rare to find a book that contains all these reasons. *A Mind That Found Itself*, an autobiography by Christopher Whittingham Beers, is one such book.

Christopher who? If you were to look through the Encyclopaedia Britannica, you would not be able to find his name there. If you were to go through the Who's who in literature, he is not likely to be listed either.

This is because Christopher Beers was no famous author. He was just an ordinary Yale-educated American. Neither was he a famous doctor. In fact, he was just one of the many who had the misfortune of suffering from a psychotic illness, something he described as "An Army of Unreason, composed of cunning and treacherous thoughts of an unfair foe, attacked my bewildered consciousness with the cruel persistency, and would have destroyed me, had not a triumphant Reason finally interposed a superior strategy that saved me from my unnatural self".

A Mind That Found Itself is about Beers' sufferings and his struggle with his mental illness. He said, "I am not telling the story of my life just to write a book. I tell it because it seems my plain duty to do so. A narrow escape from death and a seemingly miraculous return to health after an apparently fatal illness are enough to make a man ask himself: For what purpose was my life spared? That question I have asked myself, and this book is, in part, an answer".

Unlike Lu Hsun's *A Dairy of A Madman*, which is a fictitious book trying to look at the world from the perspective of a madman, thus making the character very unreal and leaving mental patients no less alienated, Beers' tale, on the other hand, was real and went deep into the process of craziness itself and laid bare all his suffering and anguish. As he said, events "forced me along paths travelled by many, but comprehended by few". His book is an excellent lesson in the understanding of the mental patient.

As the book was written by a patient and not by a doctor, there were no medical jargons. Suicidal thoughts were described as "my disordered brain was busy with schemes of deaths". Explaining the delusion of persecution, he said, "Scarcely any remark was made in my presence that I could not twist into a cleverly veiled reference to myself".

It is often thought that psychotic patients cannot think rationally. In his book, Beers had this to say: "Most sane people think that no insane person can reason logically. This is not so. Upon unreasonable premises, I made most reasonable deductions and that at the time when my mind was in the most disturbed condition".

Talking of neglect and ostracism, Beers said that to suffer from a mental illness is to be "in a position not unlike that of a man whose obituary notice has

relative and friend of persons so afflicted remember the Golden Rule, which has never been suspended with respect to the insane. Go to see them, treat them sanely, write to them, keep them informed about the home circle, let not your devotion flag nor accept any repulse”.

A Mind That Found Itself describes in grave and vivid details, through strong and simple prose, the mental anguish that Beers had gone through and also the treatment meted out to him by those caregivers who had not been able to empathise with his condition.

It also describes the joy of his recovery.

“After my long journey of exploration in the jungle of a tangled imagination, a journey which finally ended in my finding the person for whom I had long searched... Untruth became Truth. A large part of what was once my old world was again mine. To me, at least, my mind seemed to have found itself, for the gigantic web of false beliefs in which it had been all but hopelessly enmeshed, I now immediately recognised as a snare of delusions. That the Gordian knot of mental torture should be cut and swept away by the mere glance of a willing eye is like a miracle...”

“No man can be born again, but I believe I came as near it as ever a man did. To leave behind what was in reality a hell, and immediately have this good green earth revealed in more glory than most men ever see it, was one of the compensating privileges which make me feel that my suffering was worthwhile.”

In 1796, Charles Lamb, who himself had suffered from mental illness, wrote to Coleridge saying, “At some future time I will amuse you with an account, as my full memory will permit, of the strange turns my frenzy took. I look back upon it at times with a gloomy kind of envy; for, while it lasted, I had many, many hours of our happiness. Dream not, Coleridge, of having tasted all the grandeur of wildness of Fancy till you have gone mad! All seems to me vapid, comparatively so”. Perhaps Beers had experienced the same pleasure when he said, “The throes of a dying Reason had been torture. The sensations felt as my dead Reason was reborn were delightful ... so delicate, so crisp and exhilarating was it that words fail me in my attempt to describe it”.

In his preface to the book, Dr Robert Coles, a child psychiatrist wrote: “Without question *A Mind That Found Itself* is a work of art - a successful narrative worthy of inclusion in a tradition of intense probing introspection”.

The book was first published in 1908. Since then, it has been reprinted more than forty times. Beers narrated his drama with mastery of details and wit. For this reason, it is an interesting archive of psychiatric symptomatology, good enough for any student of psychiatry. The book is both witty and sad. Its messages are both inspirational and enlightening. Reading *A Mind That Found Itself* is like sharing with Beers his experience of humanity and inhumanity. No wonder Christopher Beers is regarded as a superb pamphleteer, propagandist, social reformer and political activist.

A 4TH COURSE OF CHICKEN SOUP FOR THE SOUL

by various authors

(Health Communications, Inc, 1997)

“The capacity to care is the thing that gives life its deepest meaning and significance.”

Pablo Casals

Books we read tend to fall into 2 main categories; those read for information and those read for pleasure. Knowing that my medical colleagues have little time in their busy schedules for educational tomes outside of the medical field and perhaps even less time for leisure reading, I want to recommend a book which is both enlightening and enjoyable. *A 4th Course of Chicken Soup for the Soul* seems to me to fulfil both these criteria admirably.

This book is the 4th volume of a series and is a compilation of stories, poems and letters of “ordinary people doing extraordinary things”. The extraordinary things are not feats of the climbing-Mt-Everest type although some may have required as much courage, determination, commitment or faith to perform. They are instead, acts that any human being might encounter in daily life. The longest can be read in a few minutes although most of them leave a long-lasting impression; they can, and in fact should be read at random; they do not require any mental effort and can be enjoyed when tired or depressed; in short, they are ideal reading for a busy and harassed medical practitioner.

The contents have been divided into chapters which include ones on: Love; Kindness; Teaching & Learning; Death & Dying and A Matter of Perspective. The stories include accounts of “unsolicited acts of kindness & love, of great courage and foresight, of belief when cynicism would be the norm, a source of hope in what the world has to offer and the inspiration to seek it for ourselves”. They are moving and believable because most have been told “at source” by the person experiencing them.

I should like to say at this point that I do not normally, if ever, read “inspirational literature” and harbour considerable skepticism toward professional “feel good” writers and speakers. My reading this book was a very fortunate chance. It was given to me by a long-standing patient who found comfort from it for his chronic, incurable sight-threatening condition. I had confessed to him that I too sometimes felt discouraged by the limitations of medicine despite the impressive advances we have seen and the expectations raised by these advances. In response, he gave me this book which has proven to be a timely reminder to me that if we cannot always heal, we can always try to comfort. Its positive insights into the human condition have restored my faith that we, as doctors, can never be replaced by the most sophisticated technology or the most commercially-motivated organisations, provided we do not neglect the human touch.

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THE END OF ORDER
by Francis Fukuyama
(The Social Market Foundation in association
with Profile Books Ltd, 1997)

Francis Fukuyama's book, *The End of History and the Last Man*, made him famous. It is fortunate for Mr Fukuyama that history has not really ended. Otherwise, there would be nobody to peruse his attempt at a follow-up best seller, duly entitled, *The End of Order*.

The End of Order, like Mr Fukuyama's previous title, *The End of History*, must not be taken literally. *The End of...* is a provocation to the reader. He does not argue that history or society is washed up and doomed. On the contrary, both books look forward to terminal growth instead of terminal decline.

In *The End of History*, Fukuyama argued for the vindicating triumph of capitalism over its arch-rival, socialism. *The End of Order* concerns itself with the fundamental building block of society, the family.

The family has long been the vehicle for the transmission of social capital, which has enabled the reproduction of an ordered society. Social capital refers to a set of moral values and norms shared among members of a community, and which gives rise to cooperation and cohesion, thus creating a successful society.

Fukuyama maintains that social capital is being depleted in our modern industrial societies because of family breakdowns. According to him, there are two inter-related causes of family breakdowns:

- Women's accessibility to oral contraceptives and abortions
- The changing ratio of male to female earnings

Fukuyama maintains that these 2 factors have freed men from their parental responsibilities, resulting in increased divorce rates and illegitimacy. This family breakdown is termed the "great disruption." To explain the abdication of men's responsibility, Fukuyama turns to evolutionary psychology. "For females, reproductive strategy involves commanding sufficient economic resources to protect themselves and their offsprings until the latter are able to take care of themselves. Males, by contrast, require a far lower level of parental investment to get their genes into the next generation, and their strategy therefore involves spreading their genes as widely as possible." It is therefore inbuilt into males to be sexually promiscuous and neglect their offspring. Women's increasing control over their bodies and finances has allowed this male genetic predisposition to surface and create a "deficit of fathers and fatherhood". Even more astonishing is Fukuyama's prescription for preventing family breakdowns and the resulting crime, child abuse and poverty, etc. He believes that if "Western countries were to reintroduce discriminatory labour laws that kept women out of labour markets and did not permit them to earn comparable wages to men, then the resulting dependence of women on male incomes would probably help to restore traditional two-parent families".

Fukuyama's argument entails that it is not men but women who should pay the price for men's social and economic shortcomings. Society should find a way of restoring men's economic power and superiority over women. In this way, society would be able to find its old balance. He admits that the clock cannot be put back, but is certain that without men in their traditional role as heads of the families, the countdown to calamity has begun. He advocates that there is a role for gender discriminative public policy in favour of men in the areas of job creation and worker training. He believes that these measures will change male behaviour and make men responsible fathers once again, and thus bring about an ordered world.

DR KANWALJIT SOIN
Consultant Orthopaedic Surgeon
in Private Practice

SELECTED STORIES

by Lu Hsun
(Foreign Language, Peking, Press, 1960)
Re-reading Lu Hsun after 20 years

On a recent trip to Beijing, I visited a People's Book Store in one corner of the sprawling garden of the Summer Palace. I browsed through the wide collection of books and was pleasantly surprised to see a book by Lu Hsun. I was given this book in England 20 years ago - reading Lu Hsun in 1977, you might be branded a 'red' or if you're an academic, a 'pink'.

Lu Hsun (1881-1936) was a political commentator and the father of modern Chinese literature. He started as a medical student and was disenchanting with traditional Chinese medicine. "Recalling the talks and prescriptions of physicians I had known and comparing them to what I now know, I came to the conclusion that those physicians must be either unwitting or deliberate charlatans."

However his medical career was interrupted by the political turmoil in China after the 1911 revolution. Seeing the social and political upheaval, he believed the written word was a more powerful weapon. His hortatory writings sparked a genre in China and new political thinking to reject atavistic ideas to lift the broken and divided country. "The important thing therefore, was to change their spirit and since at that time I felt literature was the best means to this end, I was determined to provide a literary movement."

The prolific writer wrote stories like *The True Story of Ah Q*, *A Madman's Diary* and *New Year's Sacrifice* which attacked the old feudal system and corrupt society of China. His oeuvre is now a treasure in the Chinese people's literary heritage.

George Bernard Shaw on a visit to China commented that Lu Hsun was the greatest writer of modern Chinese literature. I read the *Selected Stories* in English, but my friend A/Prof Chee Kuan Tzee, attests to the piquancy of the Chinese version.

PROF KUA EE HEOK
Consultant Psychiatrist and Head
National University Hospital

Dear Sir,

I share your concerns about the ethical issues raised by the connection between the medical profession and the pharmaceutical industry.

Every exercise in continuing medical education (CME) seems to be sponsored by the industry. It is true that I cannot fault the content of these CME sessions but they are always financed by a firm which has an axe to grind. A seminar on headache is funded by a company that sells a drug for migraine, one on mood swings by a firm which is interested in promoting anti-depressants. The list is unending.

The private hospitals have joined in the game and are offering doctors the opportunity for learning the hi-tech advances in medicine which these hospitals, of course, are capable of providing.

The pill of knowledge is difficult to swallow unless sweetened by lunches, teas and cocktails before dinner. A more insidious form of advertising is difficult to imagine. This was not always so.

In the early fifties, a group of doctors decided to share experience and knowledge. The backbone of the group was Dr Gwee Ah Leng, Mr Yahya Cohen, the professor of pathology, S Shanmugaratnam and my father, Dr B R Sreenivasan, who if memory serves me correctly, was the founder president of the SMA. They met on Wednesday evenings at the old Alumni Association building which has since been replaced by the starting point of the AYE. Later, when I was a young doctor, these sessions were held at the path lecture theatre of the Singapore General Hospital to cope with the numbers who attended.

Medical education was, in those days, considered an unending process. There were no incentives: no CME points and after the meeting, we went to a roadside hawker for beers and dinner, for which we paid ourselves or treated each other. There was an informality about these occasions which, as an 'oldie', I find charming and honest. Alas, I cannot say the same about the few CME sessions that I have attended.

With this as a background, I turn to the 5-way test you proposed.

1. Will it lead to any harm to the patient's welfare?

The question is unnecessary. If we used a drug or a procedure that hurt our patients, we would be assassins, not doctors. If there was a risk involved in the treatment, we should explain it and obtain informed consent for its use.

2. Is it directly or indirectly beneficial to the patient's health?

If it was not, we should not be considering it at all.

3. Will it impede the patient's autonomy to choose his treatment?

I do not understand this question. Does it mean that a drug will impair his powers of decision or does it mean that once on a course, he will be committed to a lifetime of treatment? Either way, it depends on informed consent.

4. Will it be beneficial to the society at large and all parties concerned?

This is a political, not a medical question, though I realise that in my country, the lines between politics, commerce and medicine are being blurred. We do, with his knowledge, what is, as far as we know, good for our patient with his understanding of what we are doing. It is a one-to-one situation. No other parties are involved. And, except in wildly infectious diseases, 'society at large' is not affected by the process.

5. Will it build better professional integrity and character?

This is irrelevant to therapeutic and God only knows what does. I am convinced that lectures, seminars and conventions on ethics will not.

When I went into private practice, I called the man who had trained me as a neurosurgeon. He is a man of suicidal dedication and relentless honesty. I asked him what it was that would protect me from operating just for profit.

His answer was simple. He said, "In the dead of night, when you are by yourself, ask one question. "Are you doing it for

anything other than your patient? For money, for fame, to gain expertise, to prove a point? If you can look at yourself and say 'no' then go ahead".

In the end, it is individual conscience that matters. This depends on the example of those around you. No amount of speechifying or pontification can alter the power of example.

Don't talk. Walk.

DR GOPAL BARATHAM
Neurosurgeon in Private Practice