

# Critical Thinking

**Some resources**

**Isaac Álvarez Casasola**

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Some Resources

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Editores



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# Prologue

Be the change you want to see in the world.

*Gandhi*

This is one of the five workbooks for the **Skin in the Game** program, a project to train youth leaders in international contexts. It is addressed to young people between 14 and 25 years old, and tries to provide tools to successfully overcome some of the social and personal challenges faced by youngsters and adolescents.

If we search the Web for "leadership + scientific study" in Spanish we can find 50 million results. Let's assume that among the results there is scientific evidence that would support our suspicion that "developing the leadership of our young people can generate very positive results". 1. At school they are young people who have a positive influence on their peers and teachers, accept responsibility for achieving the best education, actively participate in classes and help others achieve their goals. 2. In the extracurricular activities they lead the sports teams in which they participate, they are the references of the group in the cultural activities and they help the community through volunteer programs. 3. In the family they build better relationships with their parents and siblings, take on common chores in a responsible manner and are a positive role model.

With all the benefits of becoming a leader, we should do our best to make it easy for them to do so, unless they become leaders of themselves.

The aim of this manual is to develop a very important skill for growing as a person, critical thinking, and I hope to be able to

contribute some ideas for working in leisure or learning activities.

This repository of resources is the digestion of hundreds of hours of reading in which I have selected ideas from which we will be able to:

- Develop personal and social skills. By talking, listening to others, explaining and discussing various topics, young people will be able to improve their
  - ✓ Communication.
  - ✓ Assertiveness.
  - ✓ Empathy.
  - ✓ Pro-activity.
  - ✓ Self-Concept.
  - ✓ Conflict resolution technique.
  - ✓ Ability to build effective teams.
- Stimulate curiosity about the learning of:
  - ✓ Social Trends.
  - ✓ Economics.
  - ✓ Technology.
  - ✓ Psychology.
  - ✓ Philosophy.
  - ✓ Leadership.
  - ✓ ...



# 1. Critical Thinking

The only wrong answer could be have only one answer.

## Concept

Thought is anything that becomes real through our intellectual activity. It is a complex process, voluntary or involuntary, that involves different parts of our brain, and will always be mixed with feelings and emotions.

There are many adjectives that could qualify thought (concrete, abstract, hard, soft, positive, negative, divergent, convergent...), and many types of thought attending to rationality or emotionality implied (magic, political, philosophical, logical, analytical, mathematical, scientific...). Critical thinking would be related to scientific thinking, although they are applied to different realities. Both apply rationality and analytical methods, with the difference that scientific thinking should focus on objective reality, while critical thinking should be oriented to deciding on the possible options of inter-subjective reality.

If we focus on the use of thinking as a tool for solving problems, we could situate critical thinking next to deductive thinking (from general to particular), inductive thinking (particular to general) and creative thinking (lateral).

According to a popular definition by academics Michael Scriven & Richard Paul: Critical thinking is the intellectually disciplined process of actively and skillfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing and/or evaluating information obtained or generated by observation, experience, reflection, reasoning or communication, as a guide to belief and action. In its exemplary form, it is based on universal intellectual values

that transcend thematic divisions: clarity, accuracy, precision, coherence, relevance, sound evidence, good reason, depth, breadth and equity.

This definition, which is not lacking in detail, could be summarized as Trying to effectively reach the most reasonable and justified position on a matter, for what it will be necessary to avoid prejudices and to weigh the arguments presented to us, knowing their origin.

Our brain, possibly the most complex construction of evolution on Earth, has allowed us to survive in an environment full of dangers for millennia, but its functioning is very much conditioned by prudence and fear. We must overcome these preconfigurations of our mind and try to think better, critically. We have built an environment very different from that of the first communities of hunters and gatherers that occupied all the planetary ecosystems 20,000 years ago, it is time to evolve our way of thinking.

A critical thinker could be recognized because:

- A critical thinker does not take the assumptions of a given issue for granted.
- He listens carefully and asks well-founded, clear and precise questions;
- He communicates effectively and directly, without wasting time;
- He is able to recognize relevant information;
- Does not get carried away by emotions when making decisions;
- He approaches learning with an open mind, without ideological baggage or prejudice;
- Values situations beyond the obvious, understanding the implications and consequences;

- He analyzes the facts in an objective way to try to reach conclusions and solutions after taking the time to reflect and reason.

## Why we need critical thinking.

It is more than evident that many people are capable of leading a good life by thinking little or not at all, without using reason too much or happily submitting to authority... why do we need to put so much effort into using our mental resources? I can think of a few reasons:

1. **To make better decisions.** A detailed analysis of the options, using deductive and inductive thinking tools seems to improve our success rate.
2. If we understand our existence as thinking beings, the **improvement in the quality of our thoughts** would lead to an improvement in our personal quality. By definition, critical thinking is free of arbitrariness, distortion, partiality, disinformation or prejudice... sounds good.
3. The next reason I can think of is **self-defense**. We live in a very complex social system, with many competitors trying to succeed and the different social actors need to use all the tools at their disposal to achieve their goals. Individuals, politicians, companies or institutions, in order to survive or improve their situation in front of other agents, lie, distort, hide information, manipulate... There are many persuasion/manipulation strategies we need to be aware of. Even with good reason, in almost any conversation we will use some psychological tricks to persuade:

- Generosity: When someone does something for us we feel compelled to reciprocate. A simple compliment makes us indebted.
  - Use self-concept: We are what we think we are and so we sell ourselves. Once we have given an opinion or given in on a point, we are trapped by our word.
  - Ad-populum: We let ourselves be led by the herd and it will be easy to take us down the path that most people walk.
  - Please and inspire sympathy: Beauty and emotional appeal will be key pieces in being able to lead others.
  - Authority: Both having a position of power over others, and expressing your opinions with confidence (repeating as many times as necessary and at the right speed) will give us an advantage.
  - The power of scarcity: Any advertising message or personal offer that presents last chances will have an enormous power of persuasion.
4. Thanks to a detailed analysis of the information and the source, we will be able to **better understand the intentions and purposes** of the communication by the transmitter, which will not always be against our interests. We will be able to discern between opinions, desires or verified data; in addition to understanding the emotions that words carry.
5. **To digest the information.** The digital age that humanity reached two generations ago is characterized by the continuous growth of available information. However, such information may be false, incorrect, partial, incomplete, unverified or biased... It is vitally important to know how to apply selection

criteria to discern what is valid and can be useful to us, from all the noise and disinformation that surrounds it.

6. We can make decisions using our reptilian brain, reacting almost automatically. It is not a bad option when we face some imminent physical danger, but if we have to make a significant investment it seems more appropriate to use our neocortex and **avoid as much as possible to get carried away by emotions**, which are also more easily manipulated.
7. On other occasions the lack of reflection makes us make bad decisions. We confuse opinions with facts, we don't consider all the options and we tend to act like assholes, make serious mistakes and fail. Analyzing data, taking time to think, avoiding bias, will help us be more effective in making decisions. The time it takes to take a deep breath may be enough to achieve more rational decision making.
8. So we **don't become "excellent sheep"**. In an interesting description of the elites who run the financial spheres, essayist William Deresiewicz shows us how the "excellent" educational system ends up generating brilliant graduates who "prioritize self-exaltation, self-service, who seek a good life thought of only in terms of conventional success (wealth and status) and without any real commitment to learning, thinking or making the world a better place. These elites made up of the best enlisted in the investment banks because that's where the best returns were and they did everything they were told to do... the result is far from optimal.
9. Critical thinking is essential in the search of the truth, but we will always have to keep in mind that there are several types of truth. First there are the **absolute**

**truths revealed** by superior beings, incontestable to believers, usually involving unconditional acceptance and the obligation to impose it on others at any cost. These truths founded on faith have been defended by arms for millennia, leaving a trail of death and desolation that does not go away. In second place are the **ideological truths**, with characteristics very similar to those revealed, which arise from the preclarified minds of intransigent thinkers or also from social apathy to use common sense. When ideologies become strong, take political forms and dominate the state it will be necessary to look for refuge because the consequences will be disastrous. During the 20th century we witnessed great ideological battles with a more than remarkable result of death and destruction. An apparently more benevolent form of ideological truths are customs... it has always been done this way, it must be for a reason. In third place we have the **statistical truths**, born from the observation and recording of phenomena that we do not manage to understand or from the opinions of the majority... in no case absolute truths that will remain forever among us. In fourth place we have the **scientific truths**, they give quite convincing explanations for some time to the phenomena we observe around us but the scientific method is clear in its conditions... the absolute truth does not exist, the scientific reasoning is only valid until a new theory can explain better the event it tries to understand. And finally we could recognize **philosophical truth** which, seen in perspective, is nothing more than a great subjective doubt. All these truths arise from people's need to find meaning in life, to know if there is something more, from the need for hope. Reality is difficult to digest.

10. If we give a screw up to the truth, with critical thinking we can be safe from **half-truths**, those that

play with words until they hide the facts and, speaking of word games, ironic truths, such as the fact that the official newspaper of the Soviet Union was called Pravda (The Truth). Also in this section we could find the **official truth**, normally it comes from the hand of authoritarian regimes, but we cannot discard exemplary western governments that are changing the version of the explanations as the press is discovering things.

## How to work on critical thinking

To start with, the basic element for developing or enhancing critical thinking will be the questioning of everything that comes to us. We are living in an infocated world, saturated with useless, irrelevant, redundant, superficial, biased, interested, uncontested or directly false information. Accepting all this without asking ourselves good questions can be unhealthy.

Within our Skin in the Game project, the first thing we will do is ask ourselves if what we are getting is an illusion or a fallacy or if the information we are being given is biased, three of the most common cognitive mistakes we all make when interpreting what is happening around us.

Once these errors have been ruled out, we will consider whether what is presented to us is an objective fact, an intersubjective agreement or a subjective opinion.

With these concepts understood, we try to develop communication and critical thinking skills through conversation in its four possible forms:

- **Debate**, understood as a competitive conversation between at least two sides. The aim is to win an argument or convince someone, who may be the other participant or third party observers.

- The **dialogue**, which we will define as a cooperative and two-way conversation. The objective is for participants to exchange information and establish relationships among themselves. In favourable conditions it can be the best tool to develop critical thinking, creativity, learning...
- **Discourse** is a one-way cooperative conversation. The aim is to deliver relevant information from the speaker to the listeners.
- **Diatribes** is a competitive, one-way conversation. The goal is to express emotions, intimidate those who disagree with us, and/or inspire those who share the same perspective.

In point 3 of this manual, we gather ideas in very different formats (questions, moral dilemmas, provocative statements, stories, jokes, social experiments, words...) to set up targeted conversations with project participants.

To work on the debates we will use different formats:

- Classic competition: Presentation of the initial positions - Timed replicas of each part - Final exposure of a summary from each part.
- Opposite positions. After positioning the participants go on to defend the opposite.
- Assistants of the speaker. Team work in which only one of the participants speaks and the others pass on the arguments (by means of notes, whispering in the ear...).
- Concentric circles. Changing speakers when someone wants to contribute.



- Shouting / whispering to discover how to manage emotions in the debate.
- Making presentations with a time limit for each participant, without the chance of a reply.
- Set positions on the scale. The participants who are not in the speaking slot approach or move away from the speaker depending on the affinity to the proposal.

## 2. Illusions, fallacies and biases

Ignorance can be one of the hallmarks of the unconscious asshole. We make mistakes because of lack of knowledge but above all, because we don't have enough doubt or because we don't stop to think and process the information that is presented to us.

Critical thinking is an exciting subject, for me it's a basic tool in learning that should guide our educational system; however, it's a skill that's rarely exercised.

The lack of reflection may be due to mental laziness: the brain is a very complex machine that needs a lot of energy to function; according to generally accepted estimations, it consumes 20% of the total energy we use. Thinking is very tiring and resources must be optimized, so whenever we can use shortcuts to solve the problems we encounter every day. Some of these shortcuts are illusions, fallacies and biases, which lead us to make widespread, rather than small, mistakes. Below I present a selection of these typical mistakes that we all make when assessing a situation and that lead us to fall into notable stupidity.

These are the definitions that the Academy of Spanish Language gives us of these concepts:

**Illusion:** Image or representation without true reality, suggested by the imagination or caused by deception of the senses. Hope whose fulfillment seems especially attractive.

**Fallacy:** Deception, fraud or lie with which one tries to harm someone. It is a line of thought that appears to be valid but which violates some logical rule and therefore cannot be accepted.

**Bias:** Systematic error that can be made when sampling or testing selects or favours one response

over another. Refining a little more we have that a cognitive bias is a psychological effect, it is also called cognitive prejudice. It consists of a shortcut in thinking that allows us to make immediate judgments based on previous experiences or knowledge, without processing all the information presented. It is an evolutionary adaptation that can sometimes give good results but also leads to mistakes and misinterpretations, lacking logic.

In general, if we make these mistakes we will end up being considered as unconscious assholes, unless we do it intentionally and being fully aware of what we are doing or saying to try to benefit and take advantage, then we will become Loreal assholes or directly bad people. All these concepts are developed in the manual of Snowflakes and Other Assholes.

Our behavior has a high degree of unconsciousness. Many of our actions are executed without thinking or thinking right, they are part of our programmed responses in our genes or in our memes, other times they are provoked by the manipulation of others, but all of them make us enter through the big gate of stupidity.

Knowing these cognitive errors can be very useful to avoid slipping into them and to improve our critical thinking. We can make a small modification to one of the pearls of popular spanish wisdom and say: From biases, fallacies and illusions lives the foolish one... Being able to recognize these three elements will also help us avoid the manipulations of our environment.

## Illusions:

- **Cryptozoology** is the study of hidden animals, but it is not a branch of zoology, it would be more a part of paranormal studies. They look for bigfoot, the chupacabra and the Loch Ness monster. It is true that stories about mythological animals are part of our

universal narrative, but science has long since ceased to search for unicorns, phoenixes, minotaurs, centaurs and dragons. We hope that at some point in the near future we will update children's stories to suit our social reality and level of scientific knowledge.

- **Magic science and alternative therapies.** Some people are so in need of healing, so desperate to find a solution, that they try any remedy that may help them. On the other side of the search you will find cross-sectional scientists, subtle measurements of confusing variables, principles of physics and chemistry brought to you by the hair and of course very clever salesmen. We won't go too deep into this illusion but if you look a bit you will be able to reach fecomagnetism, a therapeutic technique that uses human excrements to try to cure diseases.
- **Placebo effect.** The mind is wonderful and is capable of positively modifying our state of health... for this there is also a popular phrase that I love: when you take care of a cold, it lasts a week and when you don't take care of it, seven days. This second one is my therapy for colds. Rarely do we stop to think that even without doing anything things will change. This psychological effect of health improvement is produced when we take some substance or we follow some advice that we think will work for us. I can't decide if this is bullshit or if we can accept it as a good remedy to support recovery from illnesses that are not. Besides the placebo, we can also make use of the opposite effect, the nocebo, also contrasted by scientific experiments.
- **The illusion of a lot.** We let ourselves be led by a few pieces of evidence that are presented to us together because we are not very good at assessing statistical probabilities. If we are throwing a coin in the air and it comes out a hundred times in a row with

heads, we will bet with a lot of confidence that the probabilities of it coming out tails are very high in the next throw, but no; if the coin is not tricked, the probabilities of it coming out tails will be 50%. This illusion can also be called the **gambler's fallacy**, when a phenomenon has a result that is repeated in one direction we think that in the next event the opposite case will be more likely... One of the favorite fallacies of the casinos and betting houses to always win.

- **Ludo-narrative dissonance.** It's a concept taken from video games. It occurs when, for the needs of the game, we accept the lack of coherence between the information exposed in the story, the gameplay and the context. This dissonance could be extended to action films of which I am an absolute fan. The laws of physics don't work the same way for Jackie Chan as they do for the rest of the world... Sometimes the special effects trick is so simple that a thoughtful adult should change channels when watching TV, but we accept that the budget to make the movie cannot be unlimited :-)
- **Illusion of control.** It is a phenomenon that refers to the tendency of people to think they can control or influence desirable events that affect their lives, even though these are actually uncontrollable: games of luck, paranormal phenomena... Chance is controlled by our ability to roll the dice, but if they are denied we think it was bad luck or attributed to external causes. The human being has the need to control the environment that surrounds him, when he achieves this, his self-esteem is reinforced, if he fails, he will suffer depressive processes. The illusion of control can, if we attend to this explanation, be a mechanism of motivational protection, nevertheless also it can be

catalogued like a bias of the family of causal illusions, those beliefs on the relations cause-effect.

- **Illusion of justice.** This is one of the main tools of moral control of the population, we think that if we behave well, good things will happen to us, but terrible things happen to good people and the scoundrels win the lottery. Karma is a very nice idea, it's a pity that statistics do not accompany it. Speaking of karma, when you do something really stupid and you have an accident... that's not karma, that's what makes you an asshole :-D
- **Illusion of skill.** Very much related to the illusion of control. There are people who think that skill, as opposed to opportunity or luck, is what allows for the accurate prediction of events that are unpredictable. For example, some people think they can predict the weather for a whole year (Zaragoza calendar), the trend of the stock market, the next political crisis...
- **Illusion of understanding.** If we can understand something we can control it; nice illusion, pity that there are few things we can control even if we have understood them. This illusion is especially evident when we try to control the behaviour of others. Luck will always have a greater share of the blame than we would like to admit.
- **Magical thinking.** Science has been making its way for centuries, explaining what is happening around us with more than reasonable arguments, however there are still people who disregard logic and prefer to seek magic in every moment. There are always universes to be discovered, there are always spaces for doubt, there are always nuances that have not been completely demonstrated...
- **The illusion of the single cause.** With all that we know, those who attribute a result to a single cause

are most likely committing a big mistake. Any social movement, natural event, group behavior, individual action... has multiple causes. It would be enough if one of them had not occurred for things to be completely different. Given the difficulty of discerning between multiple causes, we are left with only one, which has an adaptive advantage, there is no need to look for more answers and we can make immediate decisions. It never hurts to doubt a bit, as Charles Bukowski said, "The problem with the world is that intelligent people are full of doubts, while stupid people are full of certainties". A good example of the complexity of our world is found in trying to understand how ecosystems work: In the 19th century, Hawaii's farmers thought it might be a good idea to use marmots, an Asian-born predator, to kill off pests of rats. They overlooked the fact that rats are nocturnal animals and marmots are diurnal. Today, marmots are considered a pest in Hawaii. A major mistake in this field of ecosystems has Mao Zedong as its protagonist who, by considering sparrows as a plague, ordered their extermination. The result was that the insects were released from their natural predator and gave a good account of the crops, which was one of the causes of a great famine.

- **Cold reading** is an illusion often used by magicians and mentalists to make us believe that they know many things about a person that they really know. Using the Forer-Barnum and the Clever Hans effects we can get to formulate statements that will give us a halo of possessing a prodigious capacity: The body language, our personal image, the accent, the way of being seated... they say everything that happens in our head. Our most subtle reactions to a comment will speak for us and someone well trained will be able to

benefit from it, beware if in front of us we have a psychic in a theater, a salesman or a scammer.

- **Cognitive dissonance** is one of my favorite illusions: there are many of us who are able to accept two opposing arguments without blinking an eye and being convinced that we are right. The term refers to a fairly common ability today, to withstand the stress of accepting two opposing thoughts or to behave totally contrary to belief, all without collapsing. Usually the tension leads to a search for new arguments and ideas that justify the coexistence of the two thoughts: Killing is an unacceptable option... unless we are at war to save the unity of the motherland.
- **Collusion** is an unconscious process of narrative creation, whereby the storyteller believes what he is saying. It is a term widely used in psychiatry to refer to patients with disorders that prevent them from discerning reality, but it does not only affect people with severe trauma, we all at some point become the protagonists of stories that we did not actually live. A very common and simple one can be to speak in plural of an event that occurred in a group in which only one person was the protagonist.
- **Inadvertent blindness.** Many times we are unable to see what is right in front of our eyes and in order to see, we must first believe. As we know, the sense of sight provides us with the greatest amount of data from our environment, but at the same time it needs a lot of resources from the brain and we tend not to waste them, so we focus on what we want to see and we can overlook everything that is not in that focus. With regard to people, falling in love is one of the main causes that can produce total blindness. Here we could label both parties in a toxic relationship as assholes, in which one cheats (Loreal or mythomaniac) and the other is deceived



(unconscious) without being able to see anything for years.

- **Desired thinking.** We prefer to see things as we would like them to be, rather than as they really are; in its extreme cases it can be a pathological escape from reality. It is an illusion that constructs our beliefs and influences our decision making based on what we might be pleased to imagine, rather than appealing to evidence, rationality or reality.
- **Coincidence.** To meet a childhood friend thousands of miles away during a trip, that leads to regaining the friendship that was lost, that friendship is strengthened and ends in a love relationship... It is not a sign from the sky, there are no paranormal forces guiding our destiny, it is not a supreme being that puts the means for us to meet something or someone, as improbable as it may be, if something is possible, it can happen, and that is all said and done.
- **Pareidolia** is an illusion by which we clearly see a vague stimulus with a familiar pattern where there is nothing. Objects in the clouds, sculptures on the rocks, faces in the wet spots on the walls. If we also link this with divine signs, we have the perfect combination.
- **Illusion of moral superiority.** Like most drivers (over 85% according to statistics) you consider yourself to be a better driver than most. It happens to me all the time :-). This is good for self-esteem but bad for critical thinking. Even convicted prisoners consider their morals superior to those who respect the law. This bias is not good for improvement, nor for people to like you. It is better to check the actual level of our skills before showing off.

## Fallacies:

- **Causal fallacies.** Correlation does not imply causality, but a deeper knowledge of statistics is necessary to see the difference. A very typical one is to assign economic outcomes to political decisions. You just have to stand in front of the cameras every day and repeat that mantra so that it is not possible to consider that it is not true.
- **Argument out of ignorance,** accepting that something is true simply because you cannot prove it is false; and in the same way accepting that something is false just because it has not been proved to be true. It is a fallacy that infers the truth or falsity of something on the basis of ignorance about the proposition. The logical game would be something like: You cannot prove the existence of life on other planets, therefore there is no life on other planets. Just because we don't see the trick doesn't mean it doesn't exist. In one occasion I was lucky enough to be a magician's assistant, I used to do proximity tricks with incredible coins but the best thing was a phrase that told me: It is not easy to discover the tricks of the great magicians, but if in a room full of people you ask everyone what they have seen, among all of them you will find "magic". The skill of the magician could never exceed the sum of the audience's observations.
- **Zombie idea.** According to Paul Krugman, Nobel Prize winner in Economics, a zombie idea is a proposition that has been widely refuted by analysis and evidence and should be dead, but it is not because it serves political purposes, appeals to prejudice or both. Creationism, the flat Earth, infinite debt, the welfare state...
- **The false dilemma or the false dichotomy.** A very useful tool to handle an argument, two points of view

are presented as the only options, considering that the result is a dichotomy of extremes or hiding other possibilities prevents being able to choose the truth. In politics, it has worked for hundreds of years in the United States. How is it possible that there are no other government options than the Democrats or the Republicans? Surely there must be a network of social manipulators in the world's leading economic power.

- **Texas sniper fallacy.** The name comes from a curious story in which a shooter fires at a barn wall and then draws a target around the holes he has made. The information is interpreted after it seems to make sense. We shouldn't accept everything they tell us, especially if there are weapons involved :-)
- **Release it by default.** If we lie about what we don't tell, we are committing a libel by omission, which in a court of law could be considered a crime. Here we enter a higher category, it is intentional evil but can go unpunished with a "I didn't remember" sentence. Individuals who make this "mistake" should be treated as Loreal assholes.
- **The false memory.** Memory is something very complex, often constructed and rarely accurate. Those who claim to remember any event in detail have an advantage in imposing their criteria on the present, the problem is that, on many occasions, the memory is reconstructed and does not have much to do with what really happened. This can be a problem in extinction, as the great technological brother who sees everything, records everything and records everything continues to advance... well, there will always be the option of editing what has been recorded.

- **Hindsight forgery.** It's a memory disorder where we add things that didn't happen to past events. Besides being bullshit, it should be a crime.
- **The fallacy of the perfect solution.** Those people who seek perfection and accept nothing less. They can spend a whole life searching for the best, letting life pass them by. Decisions have to be made at some point, better sooner than later even if mistakes are made.
- **The fallacy of sunk costs.** When someone has invested effort, time or money in a cause, it is very difficult for them to see the moment when they have to give up. We tend to overvalue what we have put so much effort into, even though the result is far from positive. When you persist in this mistake, you can achieve an absolute disaster.
- **Post hoc reasoning ergo propter hoc.** In short, post hoc is a Latin word that translates as: after this, then, as a consequence of this. Again this is a fallacy that we admit by confusing correlation with causality, in this case when something happens after an event, look for the relationship and find it. A very popular fallacy because of how easy it is to apply it: Ice cream sales start to grow the first days of June, traffic accidents increase at the end of June, this happens every year, so we could deduce that the increase in ice cream consumption is accompanied by an increase in traffic accidents.

## Biases

- **Ad hoc hypothesis.** When we are faced with evidence that contradicts our beliefs, before acknowledging our error, we prefer to look for arguments that justify us, even if they are not

independent of our belief. We enlist so as to avoid having to abandon our ignorance or the falsity of our arguments. In a scientific investigation, an ad hoc hypothesis can be proposed to save the furniture after the theory fails to explain cases that were not contemplated in the initial formulation. Ad hoc hypotheses are often used by pseudoscientific disciplines to justify failures to replicate an experiment. For example, when a person with supposed psychic powers can "see" the contents of a sealed envelope, but who, unable to do so again, can argue that in the presence of "unbelievers" his power cannot reach its full potential. They are also used to try to explain a measured phenomenon but for which there is no explanation. The latter happened when Wegener proposed the theory of continent drift, it was then suggested that gravity was the cause, although there was no scientific evidence to corroborate it.

- **Affective bias.** We get carried away by our emotions when making decisions. In guys it's even worse because we get carried away by our hormones, in English it's common to use a synonym for asshole which is dickhead. This bias can have particularly serious consequences on the way doctors treat patients, as it can lead to misdiagnosis in the face of an aggressive or uncomfortable patient, or in the other direction neglect the care of those closest to them.
- **Focus effect.** Closely related to the previous one, the Spanish saying "raise your fame and go to sleep" can explain it very well. Once you get recognized for a quality, you can stop working on it if you want because you won't have to constantly demonstrate it. This bias can also be used to manipulate other people's opinions: the order in which questions are presented in an interview or the facts in a piece of

information will completely condition subsequent answers and judgments. So, for example, if we ask someone about their general life satisfaction and then about the frequency of their sexual relations, we will get a very different answer if we change the order of the questions.

- **Anecdotal evidence.** This phenomenon is easily visible on the TV news during the holidays. The news headline is striking, it seems that there is a serious study behind it, endorsed by an institution or important person, but the reality is that we are presented with information backed up by a few interviews with pedestrians. This evidence may be biased, having been chosen to fit with what we want to show, or with the political tendency of the channel where we are watching the news or the editor.
- **Apophenia.** Our mind tends to look for quick explanations for everything that happens around us; when we have been preyed upon by large predators we have to be very attentive to any noise or movement in the tall grass of the savannah. Apophenia is the instantaneous creation of connections and search for meaning in unrelated phenomena. Thousands of years ago this ability could save our lives, today it can make us look like assholes.
- **Appeal to authority,** to accept something because it is told to us by an authority in the field. It would not be out of place to doubt a little those who wear white coats or those who once they have achieved their degree have stopped learning. This bias connects the veracity of the argument to the prestige of the person defending it, which can be a very bad idea. By taking orders, some of the most regrettable mistakes in human history have been made. People can be irrationally influenced by perceived authority, social pressure or consensus. See Milgran's experiment.

- **Appealing to tradition**, accepting something because it has always been done this way, without considering further reasons. History is full of traditions that now shame us for being violent and cruel, but which continue to mistreat animals. There are very good traditions, which will continue to be observed for many generations but we still have many to eliminate. I am optimistic and I think that this issue is only moving forward, even if slowly. There is a story that explains all of this very well: a Zen master used to tie up the dojo cat when he started meditation because it wouldn't stop running around among the students. When the cat died, they brought another cat which, in prevention, they continued to tie up when it was time to meditate. The master died and the tradition continued for generations because it had always been done this way.
- **Attribution bias**, also known as **correspondence bias** or **over-attribution**: this is the tendency to attribute the good that happens to us to personal issues (our intelligence and unique skills), while the bad comes from the bad luck or bad intention of others. There is a nice story that may be true, in which a winner at a party interacts with a waitress, far below the social scale. Both have worked hard in their lives with very mixed results. When we analyze the social and environmental factors in which the two of them worked, we see that in one case they pushed one up and in the other they prevented the success of the second one. We are more a product of our environment than of our individuality.
- **The Dunning-Kruger effect** was exposed by this team of researchers in the 1990s. It is a cognitive bias that would explain why individuals with little skill or knowledge think themselves more intelligent than they are, suffering from a feeling of illusory superiority that

can cause problems when they estimate their skills above the real thing. Research has concluded that incompetent people are unable to recognize their own incompetence, tend not to recognize the competence of others, and are unaware of their degree of incompetence. On the other hand, highly educated people tend to underestimate their relative competence, and take for granted that what is easy for them, is also easy for others. This bias is perfectly explained by a phrase of the philosopher Bertrand Russell: "The problem of humanity is that the stupid are sure of everything and the intelligent are full of doubts.

- **Availability bias**, we assume that the first idea that comes to mind is probably the right one. The easier it is for us to understand a fact, we assume that its consequences will be more significant. If we only have one resource at hand, we will assume that it is good, otherwise we will have to think a little longer.
- **First impression effect**. When we are going to meet someone who may interest us, we are going to try to make a good first impression, which is a very practical intention since we perceive, remember and give more importance to the first event than to the following ones, even though they may contradict it or diminish its value.
- **Opposite effect**. We tend to reject everything that is presented to us contrary to our beliefs, so we lose the opportunity to analyze it.
- **Blind Spot Bias**. The speck in someone else's eye is much easier to see than the beam in your own, because, unlike you, others are unable to detect the bias in themselves. The tendency to be unaware of our cognitive biases is a staple of our nature. Many



times we are unable to see what is right in front of our eyes.

- **Confusing validity with truthfulness:** For an argument to be deductively valid, the premises or conclusion need not be true. If in a discussion we do not enter into an assessment of the truthfulness of the premises, we may reach wrong conclusions, making wrong decisions.
- **Classic conditioning.** It is so easy to put into practice that it will blind our ability to reason. To live in society it is necessary to respect many rules of coexistence. Parents are in charge of making us enter the fold with repetitions and more repetitions than what our social group considers acceptable.
- **Clever Hans effect.** At the beginning of the 20th century there was a very popular performance all over Germany in which the main character was a horse that could count and perform other mathematical operations. He represented his show in the big cities implying an exceptional cognitive ability for a horse; but there was no such ability, it was a training in which the animal was able to read subtle movements and gestures of its trainer and stop the count with its hoof. A team of researchers studied the case and today this concept is used in scientific research when the experimenter unintentionally contaminates the results of an experiment in which there are subjects who have to answer questions. This contamination is done through non-verbal communication (gestures, tone of voice, body position). This study of the Hans phenomenon served to develop the double-blind protocols in experimentation, where the experimenter does not know the correct result in the questions he has to ask.

- **The reader effect** is one of the most powerful ideas that I learned in my first years of school. I don't remember that veteran teacher in language class explained to us that the writer has an idea in mind when he writes, but that each reader is going to assign a different meaning to it. Where is the problem here, since this is true, everyone can make their own interpretation, no matter how wandering it is... and be right. Here we could be entering into the deepest metaphysical connotations of who I am and what my reality is, based on the biases I have acquired over the years, but there is no need to go too crazy either.
- **Reinforcement by the group.** Also called intragroup bias. Loneliness is a very uncomfortable situation, when belonging to a group life is much simpler. The conditioning of opinions or beliefs by the herd is part of our condition as social animals. We tend to demonize members of other groups but we are complacent and permissive towards our herd. A very difficult evil to combat at any age, especially in adolescence when belonging to a group is so important. At that time, things that escape all logic are accepted as valid: fashion, relationships, world view...
- **Retrospective bias.** It is not convenient to trust what our memory tells us. We are likely to build our memories on our present beliefs, rather than on what actually happened in our past. We all try to be coherent and respectable people and for that we build a plot script that fits our present. I can think of many examples but none that are not offensive to someone I know, so I'd better shut up, you know, if you don't live as you think you will end up thinking as you live.
- **The effect of the constant influence.** There is a very interesting expression that says that if you tell a lie once it can be refuted, but if you write it a hundred

times it will be accepted as true. The owners of the newspapers and the media know this very well. This is a fundamental premise of recalcitrant liars, never to tell the truth, so that no one knows it.

- **Effect of the experimenter.** Perhaps the arguments that support a fact have been analyzed with all the guarantees of the scientific method, but the intention of the experimenter is also necessary. The beliefs, attitudes, expectations, and biases of the people conducting the research can totally change the outcome of the experiment. When we bring this effect to education we have the Pygmalion effect or also called self-fulfilling prophecy, when a teacher thinks that a student is worthy of good grades, that prediction will come true.
- **Filing effect.** This is the name given to the tendency to publish studies that have positive results and to leave in oblivion (archived) those that do not find causality or statistical significance. Science is usually a process of accumulating studies, if these are biased, the final result will be biased as well. Let us imagine that studies appear that confirm that magpies have a greater social ability than sparrows. Later studies do not obtain results to the contrary, but neither do they obtain results in favour, so they are not published. The only documentation available on the comparison magpies and sparrows in terms of social skills would be in favour of magpies.
- **Intentionality bias.** It can be very funny when it serves to attribute blame to inanimate objects but there are levels where we lose our grip and become paranoid when we give intention to anything, animal or plant and hold them responsible for our evils. The rake has no intention of hurting us, only our clumsiness in leaving it on the ground is responsible for the hit we take.

- **Motivated reasoning.** We are much less reasonable than we think, our biases condition all our actions. We are always going to pay attention to the arguments that fit our beliefs in front of those who oppose them, and there we will be so comfortable. If you ask the fans of rival teams who is the best player in the competition, none of them will have any doubts and they will be able to argue very seriously about their reasons.
- **Negative bias.** There is a good genetic reason for this bias, if we have survived this far it is because our ancestors paid a lot of attention to the slightest noise in the savannah, predators were always watching and reacting thinking the worst was always a good way to stay alive. But those times are over now and we can relax a little bit. For some people the opposite point is in individuals who are always optimistic, they are the ones who are labeled as assholes... I think I am one of those labeled.
- **Representative bias.** To make things easier our brain labels everything that happens around us (people, actions, things are immediately labeled) but it's not always so easy to get something right and adjust something new with our past experiences since the group we belong to largely determines our view of the world, and in addition the category in which we have included the event is distorting reality. An example: blond women are less intelligent than brunettes. This error occurs when we assume that when someone or something shares some characteristic with a group, it automatically becomes part of that group or shares all the characteristics of the group. This bias was described decades ago by Daniel Kahneman, a psychologist, expert in human behavior and Nobel Prize winner in Economics.

- **It works for me.** The perfect argument to end a discussion about what doesn't suit us, the people we relate to or the food. No more reasons are needed to accept the most implausible therapies (I won't mention any so as not to hurt sensibilities), I have witnessed some quasi-miraculous healings but I wouldn't put my hand in the fire where healing could be repeated.
- **Recent trend.** The present is so important that we think that what is happening is going to become permanent. Well thought out, the present is all that is out there, therefore it is a very accurate bias, at least for the present.
- **Selection bias.** When the example we use to compare is biased, any other inference we make from it will also be biased. A great part of the studies on behavior is done at the university and has as subjects of the sample students of psychology, so we can surely have a good approximation to the behavior of this group, we will not be so sure about the whole population.
- **Selective thinking.** We only see what we want to see. When we bias ourselves with this process, we make a selection of tests that confirm our thesis, focusing on them and ignoring any other evidence unfavorable to a belief.
- **Shoehorn effect.** We are able to attribute any outcome to our previous prediction, as long as we are right. Politicians embroider it when the economic situation favors them, they will soon find that their decisions were the key. Summa cum laude for those who are able to fit Nostradamus' prophecies.

Marketing communication is one of the favorite territories for manipulation by biases, fallacies and illusions, these are some of the favorites of the sector:

- **Ad populum.** This is a fallacy that tries to validate a statement by the number of people who share or accept it. Opposing the majority will produce anxiety and insecurity, which is skilfully used by marketing and politicians to try to get us to buy their ideas. The simplest refutation of this fallacy was told to me many years ago: Eat shit, millions of flies can't be wrong... It would be good to follow Mark Twain's wise advice when he said: "Whenever you find yourself on the side of the majority, it's time to pause and reflect. In marketing it is used for the **bandwagon effect** or dragging effect and has to do with getting on the bandwagon following the trends of the moment. The demand for a product rises faster when it becomes a trend. **Epiphenomenon:** When two events meet together it is not easy to discern if one is the product of the other or vice versa. Usually there is a commonly accepted theory, supported by academia, and you have to join the herd... you don't need to be a sheep.
- **Framing effect.** Through this effect you can influence people's perception of the meanings of ideas or concepts. Taking advantage of the mental and emotional filters that individuals build themselves to make sense of the world. It can be used in many ways, one of which is to place a new song between two known and popular songs to make it immediately familiar and relate it to something positive for the radio listener. In numerous experiments it has been proven that the subjects' response can be conditioned by the words used in the question: When asked about the measures to be taken to solve drug problems, the answers change if the frame is made around addiction as an illness or as a problem of citizen security.

- **Aversion to loss.** Closely related to the Ninety-Nine Currency Club, people who only see bad things when they are surrounded by wonder, goodness and love. There is a strong tendency to avoid monetary losses, preferring lower profits with less risk. Once again this is a theory developed from research by Kahneman.
- **Anchor effect.** This is a cognitive bias whereby we tend to rely too much on the first part of the information we receive. We are fooled by marketing... 9.99 is much less money than 10.00, on a label with crossed out prices we are confident that we are getting a bargain for that first, possibly unrealistic, figure.
- **Confirmation bias.** When we are convinced that something works in a certain way, we tend to look at the facts that confirm our theory, leaving aside those that contradict it. If we think that the sunsets with the red sky and the mosquitoes are more active, that day we will count the bites, not any other day, which will reinforce our conviction. This bias also manifests itself in the opposite direction, we would call it a bias of disagreement.
- **Personal validation fallacy or Forer-Barnum effect,** also known as subjective validation. This is the observation that we will be described in a very close way by any description referring to us. It receives the name of an American psychologist who in 1948 gave his students an analysis of their personality asking them to evaluate from 1 to 5 the degree of success that they considered the text had achieved. The result was 4.26, very good considering that they all received the same analysis and it was a mix of topics from different horoscopes. The test has been repeated many times and the result is still very similar. One of the skills that our mind works best is that of searching and finding patterns that can give meaning to

anything that happens around us, even when there is no pattern or meaning.

- **Ad hominem.** Once we decide that a person is fantastic or terrible, we stop assessing whether what he says or does is right or wrong... we have already made our decision. Coupled with this bias is the **halo effect**, whereby we assume that a person who has some positive characteristic or special skill (e.g., math) is going to be equally brilliant at everything else.
- **Decoy effect, (or asymmetric dominance effect)** as the concept of hunting, a decoy is an element used to attract the prey to our position. When a company tries to sell a product that has different options, it will present them in such a way that the client thinks that he is getting an advantage, although what happens is that he is being directed and conditioned in his decision. A typical example is to add a third option with disadvantages so that one of the offers stands out from the others (in the contributions you can make to an NGO there are not only two options in the contributions you can make, three is the magic number for you to choose the headquarters), another classic is to put a striking price on a car, where the small print tells you that it is not what you want to buy, or what appears in the photo.
- **Pygmalion effect or self-fulfilling prophecy.** A self-fulfilling or self-fulfilling prophecy is a prediction that, once made, is itself the cause of its realization. Financial markets are highly dependent on the statements of central bankers and the economic decisions of governments. What one senior official says will have an almost immediate effect on the stock market because of this effect.



- **Priming effect.** Marketing professionals do what they want with us, you bloody scoundrels :-(. They take advantage of the knowledge about how the mind works and sell us anything. Psychological studies have shown how the use of words with certain connotations is capable of powerfully influencing our decisions or behaviour. In one experiment, a group of subjects was presented with a list of words related to old age, and it was found that at the end of the work session, the members of that group walked more slowly than other control groups.
- **Conservative or status quo bias.** It is the tendency we have to cling to what is known, to stereotypes and previous knowledge. It keeps us in the classic products and is taken into account by product managers when making gradual image changes.

### 3. How reality is

We take it for granted that we have overcome some serious philosophical dilemmas about existence, spirit and the meaning of life; we accept that the meaning of words is something simple, which ignores the profound reflections of German philosophers; and when we ask ourselves this question about reality we are going to work on three simple possibilities that came to me from Harari's hand: objective, subjective and intersubjective.

**Objective reality** has a very small dimension. To ensure that we stay within limits, we could say that it is reduced to a small part of the physical world. Without this being an absolute truth, since science is a continuous doubt, always subject to revision, we are going to establish the standard in admitting as objective those facts that science has contrasted and is accepted by the scientific community. The basic axioms that we have to accept in order to reach the limits of the objective world would be the existence of matter and the fundamental forces, which are those forces of the Universe that cannot be explained in terms of other more basic ones. These forces known so far are four: gravitational, electro-magnetic, strong nuclear force and weak nuclear force.

**Subjective reality** is the result of each individual's processing of external stimuli. It is an unconscious process that is expressed through emotions. This reality must be left out of any sensible debate in which we seek consensus. We are social animals and empathy is a really important resource to be able to develop our potential in community, it is good to be able to put ourselves in the other's place, to understand, their ideas, fears, illusions, value systems... but we must always be very clear that the internal logic of each person is not an absolute logic, which can serve to guide us through reality, unless it is shared...

**Intersubjective reality.** When two people agree on a subjective fact they create an intersubjective reality. This reality can be shared by many people, millions, billions, but it will remain outside of objective reality. The most clarifying example of this concept is the value of things. When the first two sapiens accepted a barter they made their subjective assessments and carried out the exchange. From that point in history until today, intersubjectivity has not stopped growing and today it sustains the immense majority of social relations, in a growing spiral of complexity, as Clare Graves enunciated in her theory of spiral dynamics.

We should never mistake reality for one of the highest expressions of intersubjectivity we have invented, **legality**. Our legal systems have the purpose of ordering social behavior, always for the benefit of the State, on the basis of the moral conformity of the community. Morality in principle was given by divine revelation, channeled through its broad earthly powers (official state religions), then, with the arrival of democracies, it seems that the majorities were responsible for establishing the moral scales, in our days we have reached the point where intolerant minorities define the accepted morality and impose the writing of laws.

## 4. Manipulation

Every day, someone's gonna try to manipulate you, for sure. We have already seen in the section on biases, fallacies and illusions how this can be done. Your family, your friends, your boss, your colleagues, your partner... are going to try to get you to behave in a certain way, and they will try to do so by using rewards and punishments, verbal language and non-verbal communication, good-natured conversations, or reprimands. Companies, institutions and the State are also in this race to control your actions, and they will do so using powerful means of communication.

Why they try to manipulate us can be a difficult question to answer, but, if we are paying attention and are able to detect it, we will be able to choose for ourselves, and not for the desires of others.

### TOP 10 media manipulation strategies.

The French author [Sylvain Timsit](#) wrote this article with the aim of highlighting the psychosocial tools that allow people to be distracted from what really matters.

#### 1. The strategy of distraction.

The main element of social control is the strategy of distraction which consists of diverting public attention from the important issues and changes determined by the political and economic elites, by the flooding technique, the continuous distractions and the insignificant information.

The distraction strategy is also essential to prevent public interest in essential knowledge in the area of science, economics, psychology, neurobiology and cybernetics.

## **2. Creating problems and then offering solutions.**

This method is also called "problem-reaction-solution". It creates a problem, a "situation" in terms of causing some reaction in the audience, so this is the beginning of the steps you want to take.

For example: let urban violence develop and intensify, or organize bloody attacks so that the public is the one who demands laws and policies to the detriment of freedom. Or creating an economic crisis to accept as a necessary evil the rollback of social rights and the dismantling of public services.

## **3. The gradual strategy**

Acceptance of the unacceptable, it is only necessary to apply it gradually, drop by drop, over consecutive years. This is how radically new socio-economic conditions (neoliberalism) were imposed during the 1980s and 1990s:

- the minimum state - privatisation - precariousness - flexibility - mass unemployment - wages - do not guarantee a decent income, ...so many changes that would have caused a revolution if they had been applied at once.

**As libertarian, I see all this facts from a completely different point of view.**

## **4. The strategy of deferral**

Another way to accept an unpopular decision is to present it as "painful and necessary", gaining public acceptance, at the time of its future implementation. It is easier to accept than an immediate future sacrifice.

- First, because the effort is not made immediately
- Then because the public, the masses, have a tendency to naively expect that "everything will be better tomorrow" and that the required sacrifice can be avoided.

This gives the public more time to get used to the idea of change and accept it with resignation when the time comes.

## **5. Treating the population like toddlers**

Most advertising aimed at the general public uses speech, argument, people and in particular the intonation of children, often close to weakness, as if the viewer were a small child or mentally handicapped.

The more attempts are made to deceive the viewer's gaze, the more it tends to adopt an infantilizing tone.

"If one goes to a person as if she had the age of 12 years or less, then, because of suggestion, she tends with a certain probability that a response or reaction also devoid of a critical sense as a person 12 years or younger. (see Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars)

## **6. Use the emotional side, rather than the reflective.**

Taking advantage of the emotional aspect is a classic technique to short-circuit rational analysis and, finally, the individual's critical sense.

In addition, the use of the emotional register to open the door to the unconscious to implant or graft ideas, desires, fears and anxieties, compulsions or induce behavior...

## **7. Keeping the public in ignorance and mediocrity**

Make the public unable to understand the technologies and methods used to control and enslave.

"The quality of education given to the lower social classes must be as poor and mediocre as possible so that the gap of ignorance that is planned between the lower and upper classes is and remains impossible to achieve for the lower classes. (See Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars).

## **8. Encouraging the public to be complacent about mediocrity**

To promote the public's belief that it's fashionable to be stupid, vulgar and uneducated...

## **9. Strengthen the feeling of self-blame**

Let everyone blame themselves for their misfortune, for the failure of their intelligence, their skills or their efforts.

Thus, instead of rebelling against the economic system, the individual self-evaluates and blames himself, which creates a depression, one of the effects of which is to inhibit his action.

And, without action, there is no revolution!

## **10. Knowing individuals better than themselves**

In the last 50 years, the increasingly rapid advances in science have led to a widening gap between public

knowledge and what is known and managed by the dominant elites.

Thanks to biology, neurobiology and applied psychology, the "system" has enjoyed a sophisticated understanding of human beings, both physically and psychologically.

The system has come to know more about the common man than it knows about itself.

This means that, in most cases, the system exercises greater control and power over individuals than individuals do over themselves.



# 5. To think about.

## 5.1 Ideas

The proposal is:

- Spend some time having deep and meaningful conversations with your peers and mentors as you explore big existential questions together.
- Discover how to apply the principles of economics, philosophy, political science, and other disciplines to the problems we face in today's society.
- Challenge your preconceptions and learn to see the world from a new perspective.

Over the years I have had the opportunity to generate many debates among young people within the activities I develop. Over time I have refined the themes and raised the level, until I found some provocative and with enough content to be useful to stimulate imagination, creativity and critical thinking. Some topics are posed in the form of questions that have no definite answer and other provocative statements, but in none of them is there a starting position and all the answers are valid. **As educators, our job is to deliver knowledge, encourage debate and develop analytical argumentation skills, not to impose doctrine.** At the end of the debates it will not be necessary to seek consensus or to take a vote to determine the winners, although the competition is usually exciting and fun.

### Political thinking

- Political/ideological location, we have to go beyond the position on the left-right line and move to the Nolan diagram. Personal freedom + economic freedom.
- There are always more than two options. Each person has his or her own correct answer.
- Start by being nice to everyone. But if someone tries to exert power over you, use force on them. [Taleb](#).
- There are three ways to approach politics according to [Jason Brennan](#): as Hobbits, as Hooligans and as Vulcans.
- There was a threefold revolution during the Enlightenment: political, scientific and energy. Now we are looking at the moral revolution: Establishing the right of everyone to live their own life, but the state has grown too much, we don't see any improvement coming.
- I am, at the federal level, a libertarian; at the state level, a Republican; at the local level, a Democrat; and at the level of family and friends, a socialist. [Taleb](#).
- Egalitarian Vs Welfare. Sharing Poverty Vs Creating Wealth.
- Would we allow freedom of speech to a party that has a political ideology that prohibits freedom of speech? [Taleb](#).
- Free Society Vs Poor Society. If you're given a choice... Which one do you get?
- Should a society that has chosen to be tolerant, to be intolerant of intolerance? [Taleb](#).
- Salafism is only an intolerant political system, which promotes (or allows) violence and rejects the institutions of the West. [Taleb](#)

- Humanity's natural (positive) rights: Life, freedom and property John Stuart Mill.
- Social rights: Food, shelter, health and education... and all that we can imagine.
- Legality is not morality: slavery, racism, discrimination, violence... were legal not long ago. Taleb.
- Democracy is not about the truth, decisions are taken by majorities.
- Democracy Vs Capitalism. Voter vs. Consumer. Institutions Vs Business. Public vs. private. Just two agents?
- Would an anarchist society be possible or is this just an unrealistic theory?
- Ideologies did not disappear; on the contrary, they were fragmented into even more aggressive and irrational forms. The classical, generalist and to some extent argumentative ideologies gave way to particularist beliefs, centred on an activism with very specific objectives. These are even more fanatical doctrines, enemies of individual freedom, with a growing influence on politics; "isms" or secular religions that systematically neutralize debate, censure, vociferate and throw those who do not agree with them into the fire. New sects that, unlike traditional religions, establish rules that not only affect their parishioners, but also aspire to be generally complied with through legislative action by the State. Benegas, Javier.
- Nazism is an ideology of racial superiority, communism of class superiority and Islamism of religious superiority. All of them try to exterminate the different ones.

- The cause of absolutism is not found in the strength of either the State or the tribal monarch, but rather in the moral weakness of the individual, who succumbs without effectively resisting the power exercised over him. Franz Oppenheimer.

### **Country. Nation.**

- The West is in the process of committing suicide. Taleb.
- You can love your country without having to love your government.
- You don't need to love your country, is that possible?
- What is a country? A common history? Common achievements? A football team? Does it bring value to a person? Is it worth it? Do we need national spirit?
- How to create national spirit. Nationalism. Look for an enemy. Define symbols and use them all the time. Control education.
- Nationalism is a type of superiority complex vs. a deep and respectable feeling linked to a territory.
- What defines the character of a state? What defines the identity of a country? How many countries can coexist in a state? Is it possible to be part of more than one nation?
- Races Vs Cultures. Do these traits define a nation?
- Why do nations fail?
- Are borders real? Should we open or close them? We are all descendants of immigrants.
- Opening borders could enrich everyone.
- Illegal migration is a victimless crime.

- Refugees / migrants vs. locals.
- Being European means...
- What does it mean to be Spanish, German, Irish...

## **The commons**

- The tragedy of the ordinary. Garrett Hardin. Groups are able to avoid the tragedy of the commons without requiring top-down regulation, at least if certain conditions are met (Ostrom 1990, 2010). He summarized the conditions in the form of eight basic design principles: 1) Clearly defined boundaries; 2) Proportionality between benefits and costs; 3) Collective choice agreements; 4) Monitoring; 5) Gradual sanctions; 6) Rapid and fair conflict resolution; 7) Local autonomy; 8) Appropriate relationships with other levels of regulatory authority (polycentric governance). Ostrom received the Nobel Prize in Economics in 2009.
- Where is the limit of private property? What has to be outside the property system? Things that do not have an owner usually disappear forever.
- Basic income, is it possible? Is it good? Is it useful? Can it solve the challenges of the digital economy? Do the math come out?
- Sharing the common rent (e.g. basic rent) is only possible in a situation of closing borders... National-Socialism?

## **State**

- The tragedy of legislative overproduction. Every year more than 1 million pages are published in official State and Autonomous Community documents.
- The principle of authority. Whoever is placed under it admits it, without that submission authority disappears, violence would return.
- The state is the new god. It is in possession of the absolute truth.
- Bodies and forces of State security. Not of the people...
- Will the state's inertia of growth continue until it controls everything or will it collapse?
- Is there any way to reverse the expansion of the size of the state? Yes. Where's the way out?
- Which is better: a free but inefficient society or an efficient one without freedom? Singapore.
- We define European societies as free. Is that right?
- The right to free movement of people between states. Until the coronavirus separates you.
- What should be the minimum group with differentiated rights? Region, city, neighborhood, block...
- Advantages and disadvantages of large and small states. Germany versus Slovenia.
- The optimal size of the community. The Dunbar number is a suggested cognitive limit for the number of people with whom stable social relationships can be maintained: relationships in which an individual knows who each person is and how each person relates to others. 150 people. Related to our mental capacities. Tribes, troops, companies, social circles...

- Segregation to achieve peace and put everyone in their place. The walls are everywhere: Belfast, Israel, Mexico-USA, Korea, Cyprus, Melilla...
- The state has the power to dictate and execute the laws, even though the people don't like them. Sometimes it acts like a father, but most of the time it's just an abuse of authority.
- The state has a monopoly on the use of violence, and there is no place to hide. Physical violence is no longer well seen and now it exerts force on property.
- State boundaries. Who is the state?
- What are the duties of the state?
- Is the state above the people?
- Institutions only serve themselves.
- The Constitution must govern while its authors are alive, otherwise the dead will always lead the living.

## Government

- Anti-intellectualism has been a constant thread winding its way through our political and cultural life, nurtured by the false notion that democracy means that 'my ignorance is just as good as your knowledge.'  
[Isaac Asimov](#)
- Who's really in charge? Degenerate forms of government.
  - ✓ Democracy: One person / Country → one vote? Is it real? Is it fair?
  - ✓ Plutocracy. The money is in charge. Rich people and organizations have the power to define the rules.

- ✓ Politics. Partitocracy. Not many countries can say that there are more than two options available for choosing a president.
- ✓ Pathocracy. Psychopaths are in charge.
- ✓ Statism. The state has enslaved individuals. We don't know how to live without the guardianship of the state. Dictatorships are based on statism, regardless of the political definition.
- ✓ Malwarecracy. Only bad people are interested in political affairs. Liars, prevaricators, double-talkers...
- ✓ Bureaucracy. Belgium or Spain could survive for months without legislative parliaments.
- ✓ Extractive institutions. They have the power and use it to their advantage.
- ✓ Kleptocracy. Too much corruption everywhere.
- ✓ Olocracy. Assembly government may sound good, but the masses are governed by demagogy. Brexit, Trump... Nazism took power through elections.
- ✓ I'm in charge :-) What can I do to be in charge?
- Bureaucracy is an arrangement by which a person conveniently distances himself from the consequences of his actions. Taleb
- Positive government options.
  - ✓ Epistocracy. Only qualified people can choose and be chosen.
  - ✓ Meritocracy (originally aristocracy): The government of the best.
  - ✓ Sociocracy: organized harmony.



- ✓ Anarchism. Not the one we suffered in the 20th century
- ✓ Holacracy: Self-organizing systems.
- ✓ Open Source Government.
- ✓ ... ..
- Why do you deserve the right to vote? What have you done better than people without the right to vote?
- How to avoid the privileges of getting the right to vote in an epistocratic society.
- Democracy is just the tyranny of the majority. A government can govern a country with the explicit support of 20% of the total population.
- Each generation has to take care of itself, solve its problems. Let our descendants take care of their challenges. Politicians consider a generation to be a four-year period.
- Basic principles of democracy. How many are guaranteed in your country?
  - ✓ Guaranteeing fundamental human rights for every person.
  - ✓ Separation of Powers among State Institutions: [Executive] Government, [Legislative] Parliament and [Judicial] Courts
  - ✓ Freedom of Opinion, Expression, Press and Media Freedom of religion. Opinion vs. facts.
  - ✓ General and equal voting rights (one person, one vote)
  - ✓ Good Governance (focus on public interest and absence of corruption).

- Majority decisions. Is that fair, even if not everyone is equally qualified, can you decide on issues that don't affect us?
- Despite the separation of powers, everyone is controlled by the executive. The head of the judiciary is elected by the government. The decisions of the legislature are conditioned by the party presidents. A large part of legislative production comes from the government.
- The intolerant decide. Gluten free in a neighborhood store.
- Would a global government be possible?
- Degenerate forms of government  
<http://teoriamal.blogspot.com.es/2014/02/las-formas-degeneradas-de-gobierno.html>
- Politicians are kidnapped by bankers and sold to big business.
- The bankers rule the economy because of the politicians' addiction to passing on problems to the next generation through debt.

## **Society**

- Development aid... Is it useful? The marketing of NGOs.
- Lies, fucking lies and statistics.
- The measure of happiness. External parameters (HDI, education, life expectancy...) or self-concept.
- Is scarcity real? Or simply inequality...
- Inequality, is it bad?
- Inequality = social justice?

- Equality Vs Equity
- Isotimia.
- Meritocracy is not fair. Only the best families have access to higher education.
- Responsibility.
- Globalization is modernization. A modern culture is a living culture, which interacts with others, which changes, which adapts to innovations. Cultural identity is a construction, used by nationalism to reject the world.
- Animal rights. 99.5% of species have disappeared.
- Where is the balance, animal rights and human rights?
- Not tax havens, tax shelters. Morality.
- Our society is a teenager.
- The Turquoise Society. The highest level of consciousness. Frederic Laloux.
- What's the point of being a politician? Psychopaths take positions of power because they use others without feeling guilty.
- Is there a good war?
- What rules the world?
- Copyright. Competitively purchased Segway.
- Affirmative action. Is that useful?
- Minority rights.
- <http://reason.com/blog/2017/03/07/berkeley-deletes-200000-free-online-vide>
- Rights of workers/owners.
- Smaller is smarter

- The only valid "ism" is consumerism.
- Surrogate motherhood... Limits of the market or limits of the ethical.
- Rules are made to be broken
- Do we need a revolution?
- Positive discrimination. Is it useful? Is it fair?
- Are there big conspiracies? Marketing
- Freedom, where is the limit?
- Pharmaceutical conspiracy.
- Western civilization is the winner, but is it the best? How long can it hold its ground?
- You ask for independence but you're totally dependent. People have little mental independence, usually worried about the opinion of others.

## History

History is a completely subjective construct that can be addressed with different approaches in order to understand all the layers that make it up: economic, social, political, technological, spiritual, cultural... The great historical events are nothing more than the manifestation of factors that accumulate imbalances over generations and break abruptly when they reach a critical point.

- The warlord as a proto-state. [Marcur Olson](#).
- Why nations fail: Institutions. Acemoglu & Robinson. Governments, political parties, education, market rules, property...
- The end of history. [Fukuyama](#). Poland was the breaking point, not the Berlin Wall.

- Intersubjectivity. Sapiens. Harari. Borders, laws, sovereignty, nation...
- Guns, germs and steel. [Jared Diamond](#).
- What is more important in our society, the freedom of citizens or the guarantees of the State that nobody needs?
- Libertarians are neither liberals nor neoliberals, what are they?
- Not everything that happens happens for a reason, but everything that survives survives for a reason. Taleb.
- Who writes history? Winners? Not anymore.
- There's no finish line to stop writing history.
- Art history, does it matter?
- Loser's point of view.
- History is not destiny.
- The history of Western countries can only be understood by the phases of capitalism.
- My land, my god. Politics in the 16th and 17th centuries.

## **Microeconomy**

- Economics is a strange science, as much as you know about rules and history, as less you can control the future.
- Possession vs. wealth. The ice cream cart in Manhattan in the summer or in Greenland.
- Wealth is not a natural resource, it's a matter of production.

- Wealth is like the passengers on a train, they are always there, but they are not the same people for long. Schumpeter
- Freedom: The power of the consumer is in their choices and purchase decisions.
- Goods and services that should be out of the market. Are there any?
- How to create wealth. Apparently they're similar eggs but you can sell the organic ones at a double price. Why?
- Price/value paradoxes. The art stuff.
- The price when there are no competitors: Snacks in the supermarket, small shop, airport shop, airplane.
- Competition vs. Collaboration. Evolution is about the best adaptation, not about the best competitors.
- We have sacrificed our free time on the altar of consumerism. Rutger Bregman
- Black Swan. Taleb
- Labour market: With the same effort and the same training, you will get a very different reward, depending on the country you are working in.
- The winner takes all... What can we do? Is that fair? Some famous athletes and artists earn millions every year. Do these people deserve such high salaries?
- Our consumption has been transformed from necessary to obligatory. Joshua Fields. It seems that without consumption there is no future.
- Financial markets: Demonic or essential?
- Financing is linked to confidence in a better future.

- The economy is not an organism, it is an ecosystem. Troy Camplin
- More is not always better. Synergy against externalities.
- Minimalism can save the world. It may be the only way.
- Capital is becoming work. Jobs are not necessary if you have enough capital.
- What's the price of a human life? And an animal life?
- Can the price of a human life enter the equation?
- Insurance sets the price of human life.
- Free markets. Is everything a valid object to sell, or not?
- Is business ethics a contradiction? Jason Brennan
- Why does this Harvard seminar that develops leadership for a few days cost what it costs? <http://www.exed.hbs.edu/programs/hplp/Pages/default.aspx>. When customers are also the product.

## **Macroeconomy**

- Save capitalism. Extractive institutions are run by the government. They write the laws and have the lawyers to pervert justice. Robert Reich.
- A carnivorous humanity is incompatible with the sustainability of the planet.
- Is it possible to save capitalism?
- And after capitalism, what?
- Can the future of humanity be put before that of massive biodiversity loss?

- And if we turn to this, and the above list, instead of leading to chaos, was a source of challenges and opportunities:-)
- The same people, different systems (institutions, laws, government...) produce totally different economic results: Germany after World War II, Korea, China-Hong Kong...
- Just as mass industrialization created the working class, the AI revolution will create a new non-working class. Harari.
- In the welfare state, someone's right is someone else's obligation.
- Industrial vs. Local agriculture.
- GDP vs. Wealth/quality of life.
- Beyond politics, what is the right way to share public money? What comes first?
- How will the growth curve look in the future: sinusoidal, slow to maximum growth, collapse, tipping point to 1.
- Financial capitalism governs the economy.
- Complicated problems or systems are 'big' but still solvable or deterministic. Complex problems or systems have emerging characteristics and behaviours (such as self-organisation) that make them non-deterministic/non-solvable, regardless of the amount of computing power available. Very simple systems can also be complex. Very complicated systems do not need to be complex. Patrick Savalle
- Globalization. Offshoring. Glocalization. Localization.
- Development without challenge of growth. Finite land.
- Prosperity without growth. Tim Jackson



- Wealth creation vs. speculation (wealth extraction) - Joe Brewer
- Drinkers vs. Manufacturers. The financial game. Creating wealth is different from creating money. Wealth can easily disappear. Both are intersubjective elements. Value is always relative.
- When there is more money than wealth there is inflation.
- Shitty jobs: they are not useful for the community, they do not create value, they do not make sense for the workers.
- The end of capitalism. Rifkin. Postcapitalism. Collaborative Commons.
  - ✓ Stages of capitalism: Mercantilism (15th century), industrialism (18th century), imperialism (20th century), socialism (1950s), financialism (1970s)
  - ✓ Free access to information + Free energy → We are approaching Zero Marginal Cost
  - ✓ Unemployment. Due to multiple causes: Technology, management, globalization (production in China, outsourcing in India).
  - ✓ Third sector. Neither public nor private.
  - ✓ Open Source: Connecting Ideas vs. Protecting Ideas.
  - ✓ Basic income.
  - ✓ Open-use license.
  - ✓ Manufacturing from open source.
  - ✓ Prosumers
  - ✓ Cooperative movement, more than a trend.
  - ✓ Collaborative work.

- ✓ Economy of Sharing
- ✓ Access vs. Ownership.
- ✓ Turquoise Organizations. Frederic Laloux
- ✓ Circular Economy.
- Collapse. Why civilizations have disappeared throughout history. Jared Diamond.
- We cannot grow without limits on a limited planet.
- Let's weigh in on the money. Money is a construct. It's not real. Where's the money? Who owns who? People or money.
- Every industrial revolution was an energy revolution, but the last one was bad. Since the 18th century we've been consuming the energy stored in fossil fuels for millions of years.
  - ✓ The new energy paradigm. Elion Musk.
  - ✓ Not only about clean energy... but also about the energy you use (for yourself and in the things you buy).
  - ✓ Coal: Protectionism and Ecology.
  - ✓ Renewable energy could create wealth, now we are rapidly wasting the wealth stored underground.
- The welfare state is unsustainable. Abusers have broken the system. The system was created for younger populations. It's not ready for 50% of the retirees. No one planned well. Structures must evolve. Growth vs. development.
- The tax system ranks labor above capital. If you earn 1M euros by working, you will probably pay 50% of the taxes, if your investment produces 1M euros you will only pay 30%.

- What can we do with the weakest link?
- Personal Independence "Vs" Globalization  
Globalization is not against me. Lukas Dumsky
- There's no such thing as a free lunch. Someone has to pay for it.

## **Technology**

- Brainless. The Crystal Cage, Nicholas Carr. Technology leads to mental laziness.
- Smarter than you think, Clive Thompson. Technology helps us realize our potential.
- We're all smarter than one of us. Open source.
- People say in hockey you don't go where the puck is, you go where the puck is going to be.
- Everything as a service.
- Will it be possible to find the happiness algorithm?
- We've never had the technology to destroy humanity. That time has come. Artificial intelligence, genetic engineering, nanobots...
- The world depends on technology that no one understands.
- Can technological acceleration disrupt the entire system, to the point where it requires fundamental restructuring if prosperity is to be maintained? Martin Ford.
- Zero Marginal Cost Society. Jeremy Rifkin
- Fermi's paradox. Where is everybody?
- From the Holocene to the Anthropocene. Have we crossed the line?

## **Electronic y data**

- Ciborgs. Improvement of human capacities. Beyond fixing the handicaps, we're going to be superhuman. The body and the mind will improve.
- Cyborg, where is the limit? Is it fair?
- Brain gadgets (electric, magnetic...) to improve cognitive skills.
- Brain/mind capabilities. Connect your brain to machines and other brains.
- Winner takes all. Access to data has transformed the size of markets and competition. Is that fair? There's no room for second best, everyone wants to have the best.
- Open source. Sharing knowledge. Linux.
- The value of personal data. Big business.
- The cloud. We give away our data.
- From analog to digital, from digital to storage, from storage to analysis, from analysis to manipulation (maybe).
- Virtual Reality will be everywhere in 5 years: medicine, games, movies, army... Augmented Reality.
- We are slaves to technology, we depend on it. Who will be in charge?
- Ethics in robots. How will a car act in an accident? A robot soldier in a war?
- For automation to benefit society, it must serve human beings, not replace them. Decisions are made by the owners of capital.

- Free energy. Is the energy oligopoly ready to disappear?

## **Biology**

- Genetic research. Unknown consequences. Moral considerations. Becoming a god. Immortality.
- Eugenetics. Is it that bad? We're using it right now and most people agree: Choosing sex to avoid disease. <http://www.alternet.org/culture/technosplit-bifurcation-humanity>.
- Eugenics to achieve superintelligence, perhaps the only way to survive the competition of artificial intelligence.
- The next step in evolution.
- The sixth extinction: Does it matter? How long can humanity survive? 99% of the species that have lived on Earth have disappeared... we're making a drama out of something that isn't.
- We may be on the list of the next, near-extinction. Evolutionary development that has not adapted to the environment. Is it important?
- Which is more important, a surfer or a shark? A farmer or a lion?
- Global Warming: Is it that important?
- It's all about energy. Physics comes first, then chemistry, and finally biology.
- The planet is no longer a natural ecosystem. The influence of humanity has left behind the concept of "wild planet". The time has come to take on the task of responsible gardening.

- The dichotomy between indigenous and non-indigenous no longer makes sense in a globalized world, including in ecosystems... what do you think of immigrants?

## **Artificial Intelligence**

- Artificial Intelligence, opportunity or threat? Perhaps the only future for mankind.
- What is intelligence? Watson's IBM program is already able to advantageously replace some physician and attorney roles, and therefore their jobs. Medicine, education, lawyers, investors, stockbrokers, television broadcasters, actors, musicians, writers, poets, sculptors, painters...
- Superintelligence: genetic selection, connecting the brain to machines, collective intelligence. Nick Bostrom
- Automatic learning. Algorithm Vs Programming.
- Physical-Digital Integrations. Mixed reality.
- Logistics Autonomous driving. Drones. Delivery robots.
- New means of transport. The most efficient: Bicycle.
- Dilemma of the collision of trams with autonomous cars.
- Instantaneous translation.
- AI can do many things better than human intelligence, combined with robotics will soon make everything better. There will be many people left with nothing to do. Will it be the same as with horses? Will our population decrease?
- Who defines the values of AI: Owners, laws, programmers...

- Who will decide the moral values of the superintelligence?
- Killer robots. Autonomous robot soldiers.

## Psicology

- What am I? The one I believe? The one I was? The one I made? The one I know? The one I imagine? The one I have? The one I want to be, my body. \*\*
- Cogito ergo sum. I think, therefore, I exist. That was the original quote, but the current one could be: I buy, therefore I am.
- What is a human being. Bio, psychosocial, social and cultural dimensions. What it means to be human.
- What it means to be human?
- The human being is a concept that could be defined as a biological, social and cultural entity, once rational, creative and free, that possesses consciousness of itself. One of the first books that awakened my consciousness was "To Have or Be" by Erich Fromm. It seems clear who has won the battle of this duality in our world, having it is the most important quality in the economic, political and social field. Perhaps we could change the concept and call ourselves human.
- How much are we if we discount genetics and memetics?
- Homo economicus has been replaced by a technological homo.
- Homo habilis, Homo sapiens. Homo deus? Harari
- The chemistry of happiness: - Endorphins, mask pain - Dopamine, responsible for primary pleasure -

Serotonin, primary happiness hormone - Oxytocin, love hormone. That's all we are.

- Someone who has been employed for some time shows clear evidence of submission. Taleb
- Slavery by companies has taken on curious forms. The best slave is someone who is paid too much and knows it, and is terrified of losing his status. Taleb
- What do you want to be, a wolf or a dog? A dog's life seems to be easy and safe, but in the absence of its owner the dog does not survive. A wolf is prepared to survive. Taleb
- Do you cry because you're sad or do you get sad when you cry?
- Does happiness depend on attitude?
- Courage (taking risks) is the highest virtue. We need entrepreneurs. Taleb.
- Why do we help others? For empathy or personal satisfaction?
- On the spectrum: usually refers to the specific set of behavioral and developmental problems and challenges associated with autism spectrum disorder.
- Better acid than bitter... acid comes out the outside, bitterness attacks the inside.
- Identity: Personal - Local - National - Race - Cultural  
Who are you?
- Trans-Gender: How much is true?
- "Cogito ergo sum": "I think, therefore I am" or maybe our thoughts possess us.
- Thoughts and emotions are a path of suffering.



- Fear and guilt are the main motivating agents of any person.
- If you miss someone you love it is because you do not realize that she is a part of you, she is in you all the time. Oliver.
- The ludo-narrative dissonance of video games and movies.

## **Intelligence**

- What is it? What defines it.
- IQ. Is it useful?
- Is it possible being intelligent without wisdom?
- The education system seems to be against intelligence.
- Positive correlations of IQ: Worryness in healthy subjects, liberals Vs conservatives, lonely people, pasive people, creative mind, obsessive and manic, self-educated, go to sleep later... Maybe
- Intelligence services. Who do they serve?
- Do the smartest people have more opportunities? Should they get less help because they won't need more, or should they get more facilities so they can work for the benefit of society?
- Elite. Responsibility.
- Multiplicity. Is it real or is it just a pedagogical resource?
- The more you know, the sadder you get. Happiness lies in ignorance.
- Programming or data analysis.

- The perfect algorithm will render collective intelligence useless.
- Over time, thanks to accumulated knowledge, humanity becomes more intelligent, less innocent, more aware. Isaac.
- As time passes, humanity becomes...
- Apology of ignorance: reality, fashion, politics, viral...
- How well would a society based on IQ level work? Should we be governed by MENSA or by AI? Would that be a true epistocracy?

## **Minimalism**

- Less stuff = more happiness. The way to the minimum.
- There is a very accurate phrase that says that if you do not live as you think, you will end up thinking as you live. We could go a step further and say that we end up living as we can and think that we live as we want to.
- What matters is not what a person has or doesn't have, but what they are afraid of losing. Taleb
- The reduction of possessions has to start with a state of mind. There must be a deep conviction about the path we are taking and a complete agreement with ourselves.
- To know what our goal is, we must define who we are and eliminate the rest. Everyone will come to different conclusions in this meditation process and all the answers will be valid because happiness will come from this fundamental internal dialogue. The ego has to decrease in size radically.

- Questions are the most powerful dialectical resources, both when we speak with others and when we speak with ourselves. Some basic questions in this process might be: Do I need this? Does my life make this possession better? Is it beneficial to exchange the time I have to do to possess this? Where is the minimum? Do I consume or what does my life time consume?
- We have everything to be well, but we live in a continuous state of dissatisfaction and unfulfilled expectations that make us yearn for more. We have been led to believe that happiness lies in possessing everything possible, perhaps it lies at the other extreme, in seeking the minimum, in being able to do without almost everything.
- Sometimes we do not accumulate properties but we seek recognition, academic merits, diplomas... Mental enrichment and the search for wisdom are very important, but when we accumulate for the sole value of possession it is not much different from the accumulation of physical possessions.
- What is a life of luxury?
- Complex strategies, like complex battle plans, are bound to fail, because too many things can go wrong. Jack Trout
- Your body is leading you against your body. In a world of excess, laziness, sugar and other drugs are in charge.
- Manipulation. Marketing. 10% of the companies' resources are used to move the mind to desire more things.
- Paleo. The Paleo movement, which arises from the evidence that human beings developed over millions

of years in specific environmental conditions. These conditions (what they ate, the amount of sunlight they were exposed to, the kind of movement they had to make to survive) shaped their genome. Changes in the genome are very slow. So, while the world has changed in many ways over the past ten thousand years, especially since the emergence of agriculture and livestock and after the industrial revolution, the human genome has hardly changed and is still adapted to the conditions of the Palaeolithic. The conditions in which we live, forced by "modernity" collide with our metabolic processes, circadian cycles and natural behaviors, generating a multitude of physical and psychic pathologies.

### **Skills and traits of the leader**

- David and Goliath. It's not always so clear who everyone is. Resilience. Gladwell.
- Black Swan. Possibility and probability. Low probability is important. Taleb. How to correctly assess risks.
- Archetypes. Jung. Carl Jung understood archetypes as universal and archaic patterns and images that derive from the collective unconscious and are the psychic counterpart of instinct. What is each of the participants?
  - ✓ The Innocent.
  - ✓ The Ordinary Man
  - ✓ The Hero
  - ✓ The caretaker. The mother
  - ✓ The explorer
  - ✓ The Rebel

- ✓ The Lover
  - ✓ The Creator
  - ✓ The Buffoon
  - ✓ The Wise One
  - ✓ The Magician
  - ✓ The ruler.
- The hero's journey. Most stories are just a story. Joseph Campbell.
  - Meritocracy: born, money, training, educated. You deserve to be part of them.
  - People not only don't know what's happening to them, they don't even know they don't know. Noam Chomsky
  - Anti-fragile. In many cases you can find a positive quality, a negative one and the neutral of any characteristic. Taleb.
  - Iatrogeny is fragility.
  - Immortality is closer. Happiness is the only way? Harari
  - Happiness is a strategy of the selfish gene. Someone happy is more attractive.
  - Procrastination protects you from mistakes by giving nature a chance to do its work. Taleb.
  - Self-fulfilling prophecy. Robert Merton.
  - Wonder Woman. Amy Cuddy.
  - Social relations: Gens vs. Memes. Richard Dawkins.
  - Choose your beauty. Dove ad.
  - Game theory. John von Neumann

- Protection of minorities: Is it good for them? Is it worth it?
- Strong mind. Amy Morin
- Nature Deficit Disorder.
- Wake up. Some people today live without being awake. All day long connected to screens.
- Assertiveness. Basic skills.
- Attachment. Free yourself. Be aware of real needs.
- Sex is child's play, gender is a serious matter.
- Sex has been defined, biologically for hundreds of millions of years, and suddenly gender appears. At an intermediate point human consciousness appears, possibly from the neocortex.
- Drachten traffic experiment. The elimination of all traffic lights and signs in the city centre improved traffic safety.
- Neomania. Obsessed with new things. Marketing, culture... Taleb
- Animism --> theism --> humanism --> homo deus. Harari. We don't need God anymore.
- Cognitive dissonance refers to a situation involving conflicting attitudes, beliefs or behavior. This produces a feeling of discomfort that leads to an alteration in one of the attitudes, beliefs or behaviors to reduce the discomfort and restore the balance, etc. For example, when people smoke (behaviour) and know that smoking causes cancer (cognition). Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance (1957) suggests that we have an internal drive to keep all our attitudes and beliefs in harmony and avoid disharmony (or dissonance) .
- The other side of the brain. Maybe spirit?

- If you don't live like you think, you'll end up thinking like you live.
- Pet owners, people who serve animals. Animal lovers.
- Values at the core: Personal, group, social, human.
- Vacation vs. consumerist lifestyle.
- Meat eaters, vegetarians, vegans.
- What is the minimum you need?
- Slow is beautiful.
- Questions are not asked for answers.
- Marriage to animals.
- Sex with machines.
- In love with AI programs.
- In love with yourself.
- Multiple partner love. Where's the limit?
- Voluntary slavery. Sex games.
- The needs are endless. What do I really need?
- Slow down. How much do you need?
- If I tell you what I think, we couldn't be friends.

## **Sociology**

- Trying to fool everyone, all the time... It's not possible.
- Insanity is rare in individuals, but in groups, parties or nations it is the norm. Nietzsche.
- Social classes in the 21st century. Upper class, really? ... lower class ... cultural, economic, moral, aesthetic? ... middle class(crity)

- Teenage society. Overprotected, spoiled, afraid of freedom, capricious... not prepared to solve the challenges we are facing. Snowflakes.
- Optimistic society. Debt far beyond her means, always thinking that in the future everything will be better.
- Many problems in society come from the interventions of people who sell complicated solutions because that is what their position and training invites them to do. Taleb.
- The myth as the common reference that governs society. Harari.
- Liquid society. There is no longer a floor to stand on. The changes are too rapid. Bauman
- Reinventing organizations. Red, amber, orange, green and turquoise. Frederic Laloux
- There is a third level of reality: the inter-subjective level. Inter-subjective entities depend on communication between many humans, beyond the beliefs and feelings of individuals. Harari.
- The right place at the right time is not enough to explain your success... the right sex, the right school, the right neighborhood, the right friends...
- If you had been switched for another baby in the hospital, how different would your life be now? How much of your success is due to your genes?
- Memes vs. genes.
- Every decision you think is autonomous has been made in a way that is conditioned by your social environment.
- Social experiments. Can we really develop as individuals?



- We can't extract the self from its surroundings, at least not without leaving something important behind. The Glass Cage. Nicholas Carr
- Changing the world, does it change anything?
- Religion, what for?
  - ✓ Reduces stress - Psychological support - Reference group - Benefits <-> Costs - Priests: Community leaders - Is there room in the future for religion? - Values to be rescued - Product of life's uncertainty, it will be useful until we have more answers - Common myths are the basis of society - Tool of the state
- For most Jews today, religion has become ethnocultural, lawless, and for many, a nation. The same for Armenians, Syrians, Chaldeans, Copts and Maronites. For Orthodox and Catholic Christians, religion is largely about aesthetics, pomp and ritual. For Protestants, religion is a belief without aesthetics, pomp or law. In the East, for Buddhists, Shintoists and Hindus, religion is a practical and spiritual philosophy, with a code of ethics (and for some, a cosmogony). Taleb.
- God... Creator or created?
- All the gods, all the heavens, all the hells, are within you. Joseph Campbell
- Deadly sins are the engine of human development: lust, laziness, gluttony, anger, envy, greed and pride.
- What does religion contribute at this time?
- Graffiti: Urban art or vandalism?
- The Irish are good at acting because for 800 years they were a dominated people, that made them perfect the art of acting :-)

- Doping, why not?
- Legal drugs. Cognitive dissonance of the state. The state taxes gambling, alcohol and tobacco, while regulating their limits.
- The war on drugs is a lost war. Why?
- Is people's freedom of choice more important than their health? Can the state decide?
- Your brain is moved by drugs.
- Neuro marketing: Music
- Electronic brain stimulation. Another form of doping.
- Drugs, are they bad? They're helping natural selection.
- Drugs were used by brilliant minds in their creative processes: Jobs, Edison, Freud, Sagan...
- IQ and the wealth of nations. Poor people seem less intelligent.
- IQ and global inequality.
- IQ and race. Races, do they really exist?
- Breaking the rules.
- Taking your baby to your workplace.
- Is it a social failure when a community fails to develop to its potential?
- In more developed economies
  - ✓ There are more sophisticated jobs
  - ✓ Higher wages for the same occupations
  - ✓ Further information (training, travel...)

## **Philosophy**

- Leisure is the mother of philosophy.
- What's your passion?
- Our possessions possess us
- Good is the enemy of the best.
- Philosophy is the permanent search for doubt.
- Mathematicians think about objects and relationships, jurists and legal thinkers think about constructs, logicians think about operators of maximum abstraction, and... fools in words.
- Transcendence
- What's at your center?
- What's at your destination?
- History is not destiny.
- The selfish gene guides us.
- All men have had bad times to live in. Borges
- What is Life?
- What is hope? Does it help us achieve our goals or distract us by avoiding critical analysis? Can a person live without hope?
- Freedom of choice. Is there such a thing as free will?
- Is the human being good by nature?
- A life worth living is...
- The fear of death is what keeps us alive.
- Death. Does it exist? How to deal with it.
- My life is resolved...
- Why are you such an asshole?
- Enjoy or work.

- Is it right to cheat on exams?
- Not going to class before an exam.
- How universal is the truth? Facts Vs Opinions.
- Kill one to save many.
- Be the hero of the skateboard (terrorist attack in London), or the friends who run.
- Mountains and rivers may move, but a man's will does not. Japanese proverb.
- The intersubjective governs our minds.
- It is not fair.
- There's no future, so why worry?
- Everybody dies but not everybody lives.
- Theseus paradox. Are we the same as yesterday? The same as a year ago? The same as 10 years ago?

## **Education**

- It is essential to stop studying and start learning.
- Education is what we call what we put inside children in the high security prisons we call schools. Taleb.
- Outside of the technical areas: morals, ethics, sociology, history, literature... to get good grades you have to think the same as the person who qualifies.
- What are the current goals of the educational system?
- What needs to be changed in the school system? What can be saved?
- The learning objectives for society, the economy, the family and the individual do not usually coincide.

- STEM Vs Humanities. Learning what I like or what will give me the best performance. Maybe we should pay for learning...
- PISA report. OECD. Models: Finland, Korea, Spain. Why does Ireland score better than Spain?
- The price of education does not inform about the cost. Public vs. private. The private ones are ahead, leading the rat race.
- Uniform vs. Individuality. Clothes and thought.
- Where is the place to learn physical education, music, art, dance... within the high school system?
- How can we give everyone the same opportunities?
- Does everyone deserve the same opportunities? Will AI be able to answer these questions?
- How long will it take for AI to wipe out teachers?
- Why is the system still mandatory? Is it necessary? Who benefits from this system?
- Everyone has different needs. How can the system solve this challenge?
- Our system produces much better results than the Irish system but also much more stress.
- Education Vs indoctrination. Spain, a common space - > 17 different stories. Would a common license to teach be necessary? Moral restrictions for educators.
- What do we have to learn? Skills to survive the collapse of the labour market.
- How can I learn better. Metacognition, learning styles. Is it all in my hands?
- The game is the training for adult life. Learntainment. Have fun learning.

- We are what we do repeatedly. Aristotle.
- It's more what we ignore than what we know.
- Drugs, we need to shift the focus from the criminal aspect to health. Legal drugs.
- Drugs for children. ADHD. Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder.
- Because of technology we are losing skills. The glass cage.
- We're not born with prejudices, they're learned. Children, for example, are color blind, but as they mature they begin to pick up on the prejudices of others and erect barriers.
- How do you get out of the system? Is it possible in Spain? Free your mind.
- How to succeed in the system? It's not about learning, it's about memorizing.
- What level should we develop of each intelligence? How many musical, kinesthetic or intra-personal skills do we need?
- Where is critical thinking in our learning system? Let's do it.
- Education consumes your time and common resources. Learning is the only way.
- How much education do we really need? Many people are over-trained for their jobs and that produces a lot of unhappiness.
- Training Vs Education. Skills are not enough to survive.
- A teacher should be: Instructor - Advisor - Trainer - Mentor - Facilitator - Coach.

- Teaching skills can be programmed. Are people needed in this process?
- If you did not have to work to earn money, what would you do in life?
- If you didn't have to learn to work, what would you learn?
- Career professionals are to knowledge what prostitutes are to love.
- Schools for minorities, good or bad?
- Right to creationism, Darwinism is also a theory.
- Competition in the educational system.
- Higher education only for good students?
- Private Vs Public.
- Study in your city or go abroad.
- Living on a watchtower of moral superiority need not be negative. It can be a sign of high self-esteem and self-confidence

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Pirámide de la superioridad moral

<http://cinismoilustrado.com/>

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**Tú**

**Activistas**

**Ciclistas · Veganos**

*Opinólogos de internet · Gente que lee · Defensores de Animales*

**Vulgar e ignorante mayoría**

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**Is it possible to log out of the system? Economic, social, values...**

- Do we need to live in society? Can a person live outside of society?
- How much of our consciousness is a social product?
- Can an individual live without culture? Can he be considered human? Would he have human rights?
- Daniel Norris. Professional baseball player and poor man.
- Mike Basich. Snowboarder in a mini house in the mountains.
- Matabenero and other hippie towns.
- Downshifting.
- Slow motion.



- Simple Living.
- Asceticism.
- Religious/spiritual life. Amish, Witness, Mormons, Opus...
- Decrease. Decrease.
- Circular Economy.
- What does it mean to live a life of luxury?
- Occupying an abandoned village can be a crime under Spanish law.
- Leaving the financial system is possible. Nobody forces us to take out loans.
- Grow your own food. Return to nature within your means.
- Living the change.
- Live where you want to live, not in your job.
- Home schooling.
- New forms of business relations: Turquoise companies.
- Conditioning:
  - ✓ The chained elephant. Bucay.
  - ✓ The cat tied up during practice.
  - ✓ The monkeys, the bananas and the hose.
- Out of the system is to be very close to the limit of the law.
- The system shapes our mental structures. Psychopolitics.

## 5.2 Social Experiments.

There are many ways to study a population and its problems. During the 20th century, some experiments were carried out that can no longer be reproduced today because of their harshness and unethical nature, but which are very useful for discovering our true nature:

1. **Self-fulfilling prophecy.** Robert Rosenthal and Lenore Jacobson 1966. These researchers conducted an experiment that involved passing a false intelligence test on children aged 6 to 12. After the test, the teachers were told that there was a group of students who demonstrated an emerging intellectual capacity that they defined as "accelerated", without any scientific evidence since only some non-verbal skills had been measured. The prognosis was that this group could make great strides in the next school year. Eight months later, this group qualified as having great potential and had advanced intellectually more than the rest, especially the first two years. The teacher had generated an expectation that led to positive attitudes that improved the student's performance. This fact is also called the Pygmalion effect and is based on a widely accepted sociological principle called Thomas' theory that says: "If people define situations as real, they are real in their consequences".
2. **Milgram experiment.** 1961. Authority orders and dilutes responsibility. This kind of experiment would no longer be possible today because it violates the accepted ethics of science in a brutal way at this time. It involved attaching electrodes to an actor and making the subject of the experiment believe that he

was receiving electrical shocks controlled by him. The orders to apply the shocks were given by a scientist who was supervising the experiment. The participants were able to give lethal shocks protected from feelings of responsibility or guilt, as they were mere instruments of authority. This experiment is often cited to explain the behaviour of the population in the Holocaust.

3. **Gronholm method.** Candidates for a job are called to an office and forced to interact with others, competing for an available position. It can be very useful to identify the best negotiators. There is a Spanish film on the subject that is not to be missed.
4. **Dove test on beauty.** A simple social experiment, with no more pretensions than to ask us about our self-concept and the pressure we suffer for the image. This company labeled the entrances to shopping malls in different countries. On two adjacent doors they put "Beautiful" and "Average" and recorded the reactions of the women when faced with the dilemma.
5. **Ultimatum game.** 1982. It has become a classic experiment to understand how justice and equity triumph over profit. A participant is given a sum of money and has to share it with a colleague in the proportion he considers appropriate. If the partner accepts the offer, both can keep the money, if the partner rejects it both lose the money. Offers of less than 20% are generally rejected.
6. **Prisoners and prison guards.** Stanford University 1971. Like Milgram, he managed to bring out the worst in the participants in just one week of role assignment and had to be cancelled. A group of students were randomly divided between guards and

prisoners, and within a few hours the guards began mistreating the prisoners.

7. **Drive**, what motivates people. In this study, the objective was to find the motivations of the workers. It was carried out by MIT scientists and implemented in India. They were trying to find the size of the monetary reward to achieve better results. Financial incentives worked for manual tasks with lower levels of remuneration, but were not equally effective when it came to intellectual work and there was a large reward, namely up to the equivalent of two months' salary. Autonomy, mastery and purpose are more important elements in motivating workers than gross monetary reward. The salary must be sufficient so that workers do not have to worry about money, but there is an optimum that if it is exceeded it does not improve performance.
8. **The monkeys, the fruit and the hose**. Although there appears to be no record of the experiment, the myth may be an extrapolation of the expected results, combined with the human response. A group of monkeys in a cage is sprayed with cold water each time one of them tries to grab fruit at the top of a ladder. In the face of this cause and effect, the monkeys hit whoever tries to climb the stairs. Once the lesson has been learned, one of the monkeys is taken out and a new one is introduced, the result being that he is hit as soon as he tries to climb. All the original monkeys are replaced one by one and the behaviour is maintained. This story is also told about a cat that needs to be tied up when he starts a dojo meditation. The only reason is that the original teacher, centuries ago, had an annoying cat. There is a video in a doctor's office where the situation is perfectly reproduced.

9. **Asch experiment** (1951). Group pressure causes subjects in the experiment to give incorrect answers to simple questions, when everyone gives the wrong answer. The rest of the participants agree to fail the answers and that can make up to 33% of the subjects feel intimidated and join the majority's mistake.
10. **A divided class**. Jane Elliot 1968. They're told that blue-eyes are better and encouraged to be better. When blue-eyed students were told they were better than brown-eyed students, they became arrogant and discriminated against brown-eyed students (by putting labels on them). However, they performed better academically. The brown-eyed students became shy and whiny and performed less well academically. When the roles were reversed and the brown-eyed students were told that they were better than the blue-eyed people, the same thing happened. Conclusion: Being a member of a group affects how you see yourself and how you treat others. Social Identity Theory relevant since a social identity affected intergroup behavior.
11. **The Halo Effect** is a classic finding of social psychology. It is the idea that global assessments of a person (e.g., whether they are likeable) become judgments about their specific traits (e.g., whether they are intelligent). Hollywood stars demonstrate the halo effect perfectly. Because they are often attractive and likeable, we naturally assume that they are also intelligent, friendly, show good judgment and so on. That is, until we find (sometimes abundant) evidence to the contrary. Nisbett and Wilson wanted to examine how participating students judged a teacher (Nisbett and Wilson, 1977). The students were told that the research was working on teacher evaluations. Specifically, they were told, the experimenters were

interested in knowing whether the judgments varied depending on the amount of exposure the students had to a particular teacher. This was a total lie. After each group of students watched the videos, they were asked to rate the speaker on physical appearance, mannerisms, and even accent (mannerisms remained the same in both videos). Consistent with the halo effect, students who saw the "warm" incarnation of the teacher rated him as more attractive, his mannerisms as more likable, and even his accent as more appealing. This was not surprising as it supported the previous work on the halo effect. The opposite is the "ad hominen effect".

12. **Cognitive dissonance.** Festinger and Carlsmith's innovative social psychological experiment (1959) provides a central insight into the stories we tell ourselves about why we think and behave the way we do. The experiment is full of clever tricks, so the best way to understand it is to imagine that you are participating. So sit back, relax and travel. The time is 1959 and you're a college student at Stanford University... In this case: you thought the assignment was boring to begin with and then you were paid to tell someone else that the assignment was interesting. But, you're not the kind of person who just happens to go around lying to people. So how can you resolve your view of yourself as an honest person by lying to the next participant? The amount of money you were paid barely saved your conscience - it was nice but not that nice. In the words of my dear Taleb: When your private life conflicts with your opinion, it overrides your opinion, not your private life.
13. Can **deferred gratification** be an indicator of future success? This is what Walter Mischel of Stanford University tried to determine in his 1972 Marshmallow

Experiment. The four- to six-year-olds were taken to a room where a marshmallow was placed on the table in front of them. Before leaving each child alone in the room, the examiner told them that they would receive a second marshmallow candy if the first one was still on the table after 15 minutes. The examiner recorded how long each child resisted eating the marshmallow and later noted whether it correlated with the child's success as an adult. A minority of the 600 children ate the marshmallow immediately and a third deferred the reward long enough to receive the second marshmallow. In follow-up studies, Mischel found that those who deferred gratification were significantly more competent and received higher SAT scores than their peers, meaning this characteristic is likely to stay with a person for life.

14. **The Observer Effect.** In the event of an emergency, most people would probably want to be in an occupied area, so they have a greater chance of getting help. Contrary to popular belief, being surrounded by people does not guarantee anything. A psychological phenomenon called the Watcher Effect states that people are more likely to help someone in distress if there are few or no other witnesses. If there are more people around, one generally thinks that someone else will stop to help. Scientists call this the spread of responsibility. The observer effect was recently tested on a busy London street and it turns out that perceived social status plays a role in whether a person will get help, but most people go their own way without stopping.
15. **The bobo doll.** During the 1960s, a great debate arose about how genetics, environmental factors or social learning shaped children's development. Albert Bandura conducted the Bobo Doll Experiment in 1961

to prove that human behavior came from social imitation rather than inherited genetic factors. He established three groups: one was exposed to adults who showed aggressive behavior toward the Bobo Doll, another was exposed to a passive adult who played with the Bobo Doll, and the third formed a control group. The results showed that children exposed to the aggressive model were more likely to exhibit aggressive behavior toward the doll itself, while the other groups showed little imitative aggressive behavior.

16. **Hidden camera elevator.** Smile! You're on Candid Camera. This video reveals what happens when an innocent bystander is the victim of a collective behavior experiment. The video shows the comic reactions to deviant social behavior in an elevator. Like most people, they conformed to the group's behavior, even though they had no idea what was happening, revealing that individuals will always try to fit in even if they don't understand the group's behavior.
17. **The third wave.** The famous movie *The Wave* is based on real events. California 1967, a history teacher proposed an experiment to his class and had to stop after a week because the reality was too hard. Ron Jones was the teacher.  
<https://www.theguardian.com/education/2008/sep/16/schoolsworldwide.film> People in society are bound together by belief systems. The rituals of religion and other institutions symbolize and reinforce the sense of belonging. Public ceremonies create a bond between people in a social unit. Durkheim thought that by publicly punishing people, such rituals sustained moral cohesion in society. Durkheim



18. **The Robbers Cave Experiment.** Why do conflicts tend to occur between different groups? According to psychologist Muzafer Sherif, intergroup conflicts tend to arise from competition for resources, stereotypes, and prejudices. In one controversial experiment, researchers placed 22 children, ages 11 to 12, in two groups at a camp in Robbers Cave Park in Oklahoma. The children were separated into two groups and spent the first week of the experiment bonding with the other group members. It was not until the second phase of the experiment that the children learned that there was another group, at which point the experimenters put the two groups in direct competition with each other. This led to considerable discord, as the children clearly favored the members of their own group while disparaging the members of the other group. In the final phase, the researchers organized tasks that required the two groups to work together. These shared tasks helped the children get to know the members of the other group and eventually led to a truce between the rivals.
19. **Spanish film "7 years":** Although it is not an experiment, it is a masterpiece that describes in a fantastic way what could happen in a situation where several individuals try to optimize the consequences of their actions. One of the protagonists has to go to prison for a tax offence to save the others. The mediation process proposes: 1. Exposition of positions. 2. Describe the functions and values of the others. 3. Describe why it should not be me. 4. Point out why it should be the other one. 5. Voting. 6. Negotiation of counter-performance.
20. **Drachten traffic experiment.** The elimination of all traffic lights and signs in the city centre improved traffic safety. So how do you drive when there are no

priority signs. "Negotiating," Monderman said, "public space forces people to be social, and eye contact is part of that social behavior of people. In the centre of the city of Drachten (50,000 inhabitants) we could see this, in a busy roundabout where users arrived, looked at each other and passed in an orderly fashion. Without any signs to give them the right of way. "It is now a pleasant, safer and more capable place. The traffic lights were the problem." An extract from the DGT Spain website.

## 5.3 Jokes

A very interesting way of thinking critically is through humor. We can use them as a starting point for debate.

- So if you are having a problem with people you are not alone. President Clinton once said running a country is a lot like running a cemetery; you've got a lot of people under you and nobody's listening.— in a speech at Galesburg, III.
- There was an important job to be done and Everybody was asked to do it. Everybody was sure Somebody would do it. Anybody could have done it, but Nobody did it. Somebody got angry about that, because it was Everybody's job. Everybody thought Anybody could do it but Nobody realized that Everybody wouldn't do it. It ended up that Everybody blamed Somebody when Nobody did what Anybody could have done.
- Interviewer to job applicant: Do you think you could come up with any reason you want this job other than your parents want you out of their house?
- Knock Knock. Who's there? Yoga! Yoga who? Yoga to try this, it feels amazing.
- Teacher: Tommy, why do you always get so dirty?  
Johnny: Well, I'm a lot closer to the ground than you are.
- Two friends meet on the street. One asks the other: "Hi, how are you?" The other one replies: "I'm fine, thanks." "And how's your son? Is he still unemployed?" "Yes, he is. But he is meditating now." "Meditating? What's that?" "I dont know. But it's better than sitting around and do nothing!"

- **THE SHREDDING MACHINE:** A young executive was leaving the office late one evening when he found the CEO standing in front of a shredder with a piece of paper in his hand. "Listen," said the CEO, "this is a very sensitive and important document here, and my secretary has gone for the night. Can you make this thing work?" "Certainly," said the young executive, eager to be perceived as helpful. He turned the machine on, inserted the paper, and pressed the start button. "Excellent, excellent!" said the CEO as his paper disappeared inside the machine. "I just need one copy."
- Knock Knock. Who's there? Opportunity. Don't be silly - opportunity doesn't knock twice!
- What is the definition of a good actor? Someone who strives to be everyone but himself.
- Many people would sooner die than think; in fact, they do so. *Bertrand Russell*
- A man in a hot air balloon realized he was lost. He reduced altitude and spotted a man below. He descended a bit more and shouted, "Excuse me, can you help me? I promised a friend I would meet him an hour ago, but I don't know where I am." The man below replied, "You are in a hot air balloon hovering approximately 30 feet above the ground. You are between 40 and 41 degrees north latitude and between 59 and 60 degrees west longitude." "You must be an engineer," said the balloonist. "I am," replied the man, "How did you know?" "Well," answered the balloonist, "everything you told me is technically correct, but I have no idea what to make of your information, and the fact is I am still lost. Frankly, you've not been much help so far." The man below responded, "You must be a manager." "I am,"

replied the balloonist, "but how did you know." "Well," said the man, "you don't know where you are or where you are going. You have risen to where you are due to a large quantity of hot air. You made a promise that you have no idea how to keep, and you expect me to solve your problem. The fact is, you are in exactly the same position you were in before we met, but now, somehow, it's my fault."

- **TALENTED EMPLOYEE.** A salesman dropped in to see a business customer. Not a soul was in the office except a big dog emptying wastebaskets. The salesman stared at the animal, wondering if his imagination could be playing tricks on him. The dog looked up and said, "Don't be surprised. This is just part of my job." "Incredible!" exclaimed the man. "I can't believe it! Does your boss know what a prize he has in you? An animal that can talk!" "No, no," pleaded the dog. "Please don't tell him! If that man finds out I can talk, he'll make me answer the phone as well!"
- **THE NEW FIRM.** A young businessman had just started his own firm. He rented a beautiful office and had it furnished with antiques. Sitting there, he saw a man come into the outer office. Wishing to appear the hot shot, the businessman picked up the phone and started to pretend he had a big deal working. He threw huge figures around and made giant commitments. Finally he hung up and asked the visitor, "Can I help you?" The man said, "Yeah, I've come to activate your phone lines."
- Signed up for an assertiveness course. First week the teacher never turned up. Second week the teacher never turned up. Third week no teacher again so I went to the office to complain. They said, "Congratulations you've passed."

- An Austrian talking to a Swiss about how much in common they have... even we have the same colours in the flag. Yes, say the Swiss, but yours is a negative and ours is a positive one.
- A company decides to organize "de-stressing" courses for its executives. The course consists of spending a week on a farm, doing farm and poultry work. The manager introduces himself to the farmer and must follow his instructions. The first thing is to cut heads of garlic and pile them up in a truck for the market. The executive does this in the middle of the morning, surprising the farmer, as it usually takes a couple of days. Now, the next task is to spread manure on this field. The executive does it in an hour. The farmer doesn't understand; that job, apart from being unpleasant, takes a whole day. The farmer, who sees that the course is going to be over in two days, suggests something more relaxed, which he can do sitting down. You have to select from a ton of potatoes those that are small to send to Canarian restaurants, and the big ones for the potato chip factory. Simple and comfortable. The farmer comes back the next day and sees the executive with the whole tonne, and with a small potato in his left hand and a big one in his right hand, looking at them with bewilderment. But how is it that he cuts heads of garlic in such a short time, spreads manure so easily, and is unable to decide between large and small potatoes? The manager answers with a grim look: "Look, I .... cutting heads as much as they ask me, spreading shit is great for me, but this decision making ..."
- It is better to keep your mouth closed and let people think you are a fool than to open it and remove all doubt. -- Mark Twain

- **GIVING 100% PERCENT:** I hope always to be giving fully 100% at work: 12% on Monday, 23% on Tuesday, 40% on Wednesday, 20% on Thursday, and 5% on Friday.
- **FOUR PEOPLE.** This is a story about four people named Everybody, Somebody, Anybody, and Nobody. There was an important job to be done and Everybody was asked to do it. Everybody was sure Somebody would do it. Anybody could have done it, but Nobody did it. Somebody got angry about that, because it was Everybody's job. Everybody thought Anybody could do it but Nobody realized that Everybody wouldn't do it. It ended up that Everybody blamed Somebody when Nobody did what Anybody could have done.
- A linguistics professor was lecturing to his class one day. "In English," he said, "a double negative forms a positive. In some languages though, such as Russian, a double negative is still a negative. However," he pointed out, "there is no language wherein a double positive can form a negative." A voice from the back of the room piped up, "Yeah, right."
- **NEW SECRETARY.** The boss was very exasperated with his new secretary. She ignored the telephone when it rang. "You must answer that telephone," he told her irritably. "Okay," she replied, "but it all seems so silly. Nine times out of ten, it's for you!"

## 5.4 Zen Stories

This collection of stories has been defined after many hours of browsing and content selection. In some cases they are Zen stories that link to Japanese folklore characters but others have more western origins. All of them can be very thought-provoking.

### 1. Destiny

During a momentous battle, a Japanese general decided to attack even though his army was greatly outnumbered. He was confident they would win, but his men were filled with doubt. On the way to the battle, they stopped at a religious shrine. After praying with the men, the general took out a coin and said, "I shall now toss this coin. If it is heads, we shall win. If tails, we shall lose. Destiny will now reveal itself."

He threw the coin into the air and all watched intently as it landed. It was heads. The soldiers were so overjoyed and filled with confidence that they vigorously attacked the enemy and were victorious. After the battle, a lieutenant remarked to the general, "No one can change destiny."

"Quite right," the general replied as he showed the lieutenant the coin, which had heads on both sides.

### 2. Concentration

After winning several archery contests, the young and rather boastful champion challenged a Zen master who was renowned for his skill as an archer. The young man demonstrated remarkable technical proficiency when he hit a distant bull's eye on his first try, and then split that arrow with his second shot. "There," he said to the old man, "see if you can match that!"



Undisturbed, the master did not draw his bow, but rather motioned for the young archer to follow him up the mountain. Curious about the old fellow's intentions, the champion followed him high into the mountain until they reached a deep chasm spanned by a rather flimsy and shaky log. Calmly stepping out onto the middle of the unsteady and certainly perilous bridge, the old master picked a far away tree as a target, drew his bow, and fired a clean, direct hit. "Now it is your turn," he said as he gracefully stepped back onto the safe ground.

Staring with terror into the seemingly bottomless and beckoning abyss, the young man could not force himself to step out onto the log, no less shoot at a target. "You have much skill with your bow," the master said, sensing his challenger's predicament, "but you have little skill with the mind that lets loose the shot."

### **3. The 99 coins club**

Once upon a time, there lived a King who, despite his luxurious lifestyle, was neither happy nor content. One day, the King came upon a servant who was singing happily while he worked.

This fascinated the King; why was he, the Supreme Ruler of the Land, unhappy and gloomy, while a lowly servant had so much joy. The King asked the servant, "Why are you so happy?"

The man replied, "Your Majesty, I am a mere servant, but my family and I don't require much – just a roof over our heads and warm food to fill our tummies. We're content with that."

The king was not satisfied with that reply. Later in the day, he sought the advice of his most trusted advisor. After hearing the King's woes and the servant's story, the advisor said,

"Your Majesty, I believe that the servant has not been made part of the 99 Club."

"The 99 Club? And what exactly is that?" the King inquired.

The advisor replied, "Your Majesty, you shall see if you place 99 Gold coins in a bag and leave it at this servant's doorstep."

The curious king had it done. When the servant saw the bag lying at the door, he took it into his house. When he opened the bag, he let out a great shout of joy... So many gold coins!

He began to count them. After several counts, he was at last convinced that there were 99 coins. He wondered, "What could've happened to that last gold coin? Surely, no one would leave 99 coins!"

He looked everywhere he could, but that final coin was elusive. Finally, exhausted, he decided that he was going to have to work harder than ever to earn that gold coin and complete his collection.

From that day, the servant's life changed. He became overworked, horribly grumpy, and castigated his family for not helping him make that 100th gold coin. He stopped singing while he worked.

Witnessing this drastic transformation, the King became more curious. He summoned his advisor who explained: "Your Majesty, the servant has now officially joined The 99 Club."

He continued, "There are those people who have enough to be happy but are never contented, because they're always yearning and striving for that extra coin. They keep telling themselves: "Let me get that one final thing and then I will be happy for life. And this goes on and on.."

We can be happy, even with very little in our lives, but the minute we're given something bigger and better, we want even more! We lose sleep, happiness and we hurt the people

around us who care; all these as a price for our growing needs and desires. Then we've joined the 99 club!

#### **4. The Gift**

There once lived a great warrior. Though quite old, he still was able to defeat any challenger. His reputation extended far and wide throughout the land and many students gathered to study under him.

One day an infamous young warrior arrived at the village. He was determined to be the first man to defeat the great master. Along with his strength, he had an uncanny ability to spot and exploit any weakness in an opponent. He would wait for his opponent to make the first move, thus revealing a weakness, and then would strike with merciless force and lightning speed. No one had ever lasted with him in a match beyond the first move.

Much against the advice of his concerned students, the old master gladly accepted the young warrior's challenge. As the two squared off for battle, the young warrior began to hurl insults at the old master. He threw dirt and spit in his face. For hours he verbally assaulted him with every curse and insult known to mankind. But the old warrior merely stood there motionless and calm. Finally, the young warrior exhausted himself. Knowing he was defeated, he left feeling shamed.

Somewhat disappointed that he did not fight the insolent youth, the students gathered around the old master and questioned him. "How could you endure such an indignity? How did you drive him away?"

"If someone comes to give you a gift and you do not receive it," the master replied, "to whom does the gift belong?"

#### **5. Going with the Flow**

A Taoist story tells of an old man who accidentally fell into the river rapids leading to a high and dangerous waterfall. Onlookers feared for his life. Miraculously, he came out alive and unharmed downstream at the bottom of the falls. People asked him how he managed to survive.

"I accommodated myself to the water, not the water to me. Without thinking, I allowed myself to be shaped by it. Plunging into the swirl, I came out with the swirl. This is how I survived."

## **6. It will pass**

A student went to his meditation teacher and said, "My meditation is horrible! I feel so distracted, or my legs ache, or I'm constantly falling asleep. It's just horrible!"

"It will pass," the teacher said matter-of-factly.

A week later, the student came back to his teacher. "My meditation is wonderful! I feel so aware, so peaceful, so alive! It's just wonderful!"

"It will pass," the teacher replied matter-of-factly.

## **7. Just Two Words**

There once was a monastery that was very strict. Following a vow of silence, no one was allowed to speak at all. But there was one exception to this rule. Every ten years, the monks were permitted to speak just two words. After spending his first ten years at the monastery, one monk went to the head monk. "It has been ten years," said the head monk. "What are the two words you would like to speak?"

"Bed... hard..." said the monk.

"I see," replied the head monk.

Ten years later, the monk returned to the head monk's office. "It has been ten more years," said the head monk. "What are the two words you would like to speak?"

"Food... stinks..." said the monk.

"I see," replied the head monk.

Yet another ten years passed and the monk once again met with the head monk who asked, "What are your two words now, after these ten years?"

"I... quit!" said the monk.

"Well, I can see why," replied the head monk. "All you ever do is complain."

## **8. Tie the cat**

When the spiritual teacher and his disciples began their evening meditation, the cat who lived in the monastery made such noise that it distracted them. So the teacher ordered that the cat be tied up during the evening practice. Years later, when the teacher died, the cat continued to be tied up during the meditation session. And when the cat eventually died, another cat was brought to the monastery and tied up. Centuries later, learned descendants of the spiritual teacher wrote scholarly treatises about the religious significance of tying up a cat for meditation practice.

## **9. The mule**

"Thank God we took a mule with us on the picnic because when one of the boys was injured we used the mule to carry him back."

"How did he get injured?"

"The mule kicked him."

## **10. Knowing Fish**

One day Chuang Tzu and a friend were walking by a river. "Look at the fish swimming about," said Chuang Tzu, "They are really enjoying themselves."

"You are not a fish," replied the friend, "So you can't truly know that they are enjoying themselves."

"You are not me," said Chuang Tzu. "So how do you know that I do not know that the fish are enjoying themselves?"

## **11. Maybe**

There is a Taoist story of an old farmer who had worked his crops for many years. One day his horse ran away. Upon hearing the news, his neighbors came to visit. "Such bad luck," they said sympathetically. "May be," the farmer replied.

The next morning the horse returned, bringing with it three other wild horses. "How wonderful," the neighbors exclaimed. "May be," replied the old man.

The following day, his son tried to ride one of the untamed horses, was thrown, and broke his leg. The neighbors again came to offer their sympathy on his misfortune. "May be," answered the farmer.

The day after, military officials came to the village to draft young men into the army. Seeing that the son's leg was broken, they passed him by. The neighbors congratulated the farmer on how well things had turned out. "May be," said the farmer.

## **12. More is Not Enough. The Stone Cutter**

There was once a stone cutter who was dissatisfied with himself and with his position in life.

One day he passed a wealthy merchant's house. Through the open gateway, he saw many fine possessions and important visitors. "How powerful that merchant must be!" thought the stone cutter. He became very envious and wished that he could be like the merchant.

To his great surprise, he suddenly became the merchant, enjoying more luxuries and power than he had ever imagined, but envied and detested by those less wealthy than himself. Soon a high official passed by, carried in a sedan chair, accompanied by attendants and escorted by soldiers beating gongs. Everyone, no matter how wealthy, had to bow low before the procession. "How powerful that official is!" he thought. "I wish that I could be a high official!"

Then he became the high official, carried everywhere in his embroidered sedan chair, feared and hated by the people all around. It was a hot summer day, so the official felt very uncomfortable in the sticky sedan chair. He looked up at the sun. It shone proudly in the sky, unaffected by his presence. "How powerful the sun is!" he thought. "I wish that I could be the sun!"

Then he became the sun, shining fiercely down on everyone, scorching the fields, cursed by the farmers and laborers. But a huge black cloud moved between him and the earth, so that his light could no longer shine on everything below. "How powerful that storm cloud is!" he thought. "I wish that I could be a cloud!"

Then he became the cloud, flooding the fields and villages, shouted at by everyone. But soon he found that he was being pushed away by some great force, and realized that it was the wind. "How powerful it is!" he thought. "I wish that I could be the wind!"

Then he became the wind, blowing tiles off the roofs of houses, uprooting trees, feared and hated by all below him. But after a while, he ran up against something that would not

move, no matter how forcefully he blew against it - a huge, towering rock. "How powerful that rock is!" he thought. "I wish that I could be a rock!"

Then he became the rock, more powerful than anything else on earth. But as he stood there, he heard the sound of a hammer pounding a chisel into the hard surface, and felt himself being changed. "What could be more powerful than I, the rock?" he thought.

He looked down and saw far below him the figure of a stone cutter.

### **13. The Nature of Things**

Two monks were washing their bowls in the river when they noticed a scorpion that was drowning. One monk immediately scooped it up and set it upon the bank. In the process he was stung. He went back to washing his bowl and again the scorpion fell in. The monk saved the scorpion and was again stung. The other monk asked him, "Friend, why do you continue to save the scorpion when you know it's nature is to sting?"

"Because," the monk replied, "to save it is my nature."

### **14. Nature's Beauty**

A priest was in charge of the garden within a famous Zen temple. He had been given the job because he loved the flowers, shrubs, and trees. Next to the temple there was another, smaller temple where there lived a very old Zen master. One day, when the priest was expecting some special guests, he took extra care in tending to the garden. He pulled the weeds, trimmed the shrubs, combed the moss, and spent a long time meticulously raking up and carefully arranging all the dry autumn leaves. As he worked, the old master watched



him with interest from across the wall that separated the temples.

When he had finished, the priest stood back to admire his work. "Isn't it beautiful," he called out to the old master. "Yes," replied the old man, "but there is something missing. Help me over this wall and I'll put it right for you."

After hesitating, the priest lifted the old fellow over and set him down. Slowly, the master walked to the tree near the center of the garden, grabbed it by the trunk, and shook it. Leaves showered down all over the garden. "There," said the old man, "you can put me back now."

## **15. Obsessed**

Two traveling monks reached a river where they met a young woman. Wary of the current, she asked if they could carry her across. One of the monks hesitated, but the other quickly picked her up onto his shoulders, transported her across the water, and put her down on the other bank. She thanked him and departed.

As the monks continued on their way, the one was brooding and preoccupied. Unable to hold his silence, he spoke out. "Brother, our spiritual training teaches us to avoid any contact with women, but you picked that one up on your shoulders and carried her!"

"Brother," the second monk replied, "I set her down on the other side, while you are still carrying her."

## **16. Tea Combat**

A master of the tea ceremony in old Japan once accidentally slighted a soldier. He quickly apologized, but the rather impetuous soldier demanded that the matter be settled in a sword duel.

The tea master, who had no experience with swords, asked the advice of a fellow Zen master who did possess such skill. As he was served by his friend, the Zen swordsman could not help but notice how the tea master performed his art with perfect concentration and tranquility.

"Tomorrow," the Zen swordsman said, "when you duel the soldier, hold your weapon above your head, as if ready to strike, and face him with the same concentration and tranquility with which you perform the tea ceremony."

The next day, at the appointed time and place for the duel, the tea master followed this advice. The soldier, readying himself to strike, stared for a long time into the fully attentive but calm face of the tea master. Finally, the soldier lowered his sword, apologized for his arrogance, and left without a blow being struck.

## **17. Transient**

A famous spiritual teacher came to the front door of the King's palace. None of the guards tried to stop him as he entered and made his way to where the King himself was sitting on his throne. "What do you want?" asked the King, immediately recognizing the visitor.

"I would like a place to sleep in this inn," replied the teacher.

"But this is not an inn," said the King, "It is my palace."

"May I ask who owned this palace before you?"

"My father. He is dead."

"And who owned it before him?"

"My grandfather. He too is dead."

"And this place where people live for a short time and then move on - did I hear you say that it is NOT an inn?"

## **18. Without fear**

During the civil wars in feudal Japan, an invading army would quickly sweep into a town and take control. In one particular village, everyone fled just before the army arrived - everyone except the Zen master. Curious about this old fellow, the general went to the temple to see for himself what kind of man this master was. When he wasn't treated with the deference and submissiveness to which he was accustomed, the general burst into anger.

"You fool," he shouted as he reached for his sword, "don't you realize you are standing before a man who could run you through without blinking an eye!"

But despite the threat, the master seemed unmoved. "And do you realize," the master replied calmly, "that you are standing before a man who can be run through without blinking an eye?"

## **19. Working hard**

A martial arts student went to his teacher and said earnestly, "I am devoted to studying your martial system. How long will it take me to master it." The teacher's reply was casual, "Ten years." Impatiently, the student answered, "But I want to master it faster than that. I will work very hard. I will practice everyday, ten or more hours a day if I have to. How long will it take then?" The teacher thought for a moment, "20 years."

"But, I do not understand," said the disappointed student. "At each time that I say I will work harder, you say it will take me longer. Why do you say that?"

Replied the Master, "When you have one eye on the goal, you only have one eye on the path."

## **20. The master and his sons**

There was once a great master of kenjutsu (sword) renowned throughout Japan who, when visited by another great master, wished to demonstrate the teaching he had given his three sons.

The master winked at his guest and placed a heavy metal vase on the corner of the sliding doors, wedged it with a piece of bamboo and a small nail in such a way that the vase would fall on the head of the first one who came into the room when the door was opened.

While chatting and drinking tea, the master called his oldest son who came immediately. Before opening the door, he felt the presence of the vase and its position. He slid back the door, put his left hand through the gap to catch the vase and continued opening the door with his right hand. Then, clutching the vase to his chest, he entered the room, shutting the door behind him and replaced the vase; he came forward and greeted the two masters. 'This is my oldest son', said the host smiling, 'he has learnt my teaching well and one day he will undoubtedly be a master of kenjutsu.'

The second son was called and he entered without hesitating and only caught the vase at the last moment: it almost landed on his head. 'This is my second son', said the master, 'he still has a lot to learn but he is improving every day.'

Then the third son was called. Entering the room hurriedly, he was struck on the head by the vase. The blow was a heavy one but before the vase hit the tatami, he drew his sword and, in one quick action, cut the piece of metal in two. 'This is my youngest son, Jiro', said the old man, 'he is the baby of the family and he still has a long way to go.'

## **21. Three arrows**

In hope of encouraging three of his sons, Mōri Takamoto, Kikkawa Motoharu, and Kobayakawa Takakage, to work

together for the benefit of the Mōri clan. Mōri is said to have handed each of his sons an arrow and asked each snap it. After each snapped his arrow, Motonari produced three arrows and asked his sons to snap all three at once. When they were unable to do so, Motonari explained that one arrow could be broken easily, but three arrows held together could not.

## **22. Don't give up.**

A group of frogs were traveling through the woods, when two of them fell into a deep pit. All the other frogs gathered around the pit. When they saw how deep it was, they told the two frogs that they were as good as dead.

The two frogs ignored the comments and tried to jump up out of the pit with all of their might. The other frogs kept telling them to stop, that they were as good as dead. Finally, one of the frogs took heed to what the other frogs were saying and gave up. She fell down and died.

The other frog continued to jump as hard as she could. Once again, the crowd of frogs yelled at her to stop the pain and just die. She began jumping even harder and finally made it out. When she got out, the other frogs said, "Did you not hear us?" The frog explained to them that she was deaf - she thought they were encouraging her to jump out of the hole the entire time.

## **23. Is that so?**

A beautiful girl in the village was pregnant. Her angry parents demanded to know who was the father. At first resistant to confess, the anxious and embarrassed girl finally pointed to Hakuin, the Zen master whom everyone previously revered for living such a pure life. When the outraged parents confronted Hakuin with their daughter's accusation, he simply replied "Is that so?"

When the child was born, the parents brought it to the Hakuin, who now was viewed as a pariah by the whole village. They demanded that he take care of the child since it was his responsibility. "Is that so?" Hakuin said calmly as he accepted the child.

For many months he took very good care of the child until the daughter could no longer withstand the lie she had told. She confessed that the real father was a young man in the village whom she had tried to protect. The parents immediately went to Hakuin to see if he would return the baby. With profuse apologies they explained what had happened. "Is that so?" Hakuin said as he handed them the child.

#### **24. Full cup**

Nan-in, a Japanese master during the Meiji era (1868 - 1912), received a university professor who came to inquire about Zen.

Nan-in served tea. He poured his visitor's cup full, and then kept on pouring.

The professor watched the overflow until he no longer could restrain himself. "It is overfull. No more will go in!"

"Like this cup", Nan-in said, "you are full of your own opinions and speculations. How can I show you Zen unless you first empty your cup?"

#### **25. Tail and leg**

Abraham Lincoln once asked one of his secretaries, "If you call a tail a leg, how many legs does a horse have?"

"Five," replied the secretary.

"No," said the President, "The answer is four. Calling a tail a leg doesn't make it a leg."

## **26. The fear**

According to an ancient Indian fable, a mouse was in constant distress because of its fear of the cat. A magician took pity on it and turned it into a cat. But then it became afraid of the dog. So the magician turned it into a dog. Then it began to fear the panther. So the magician turned it into a panther.

Whereupon it was full of fear for the hunter. At this point the magician gave up, and turned it into a mouse again saying, "Nothing I do for you is going to be of any help because you have the heart of a mouse."

## **27. Attachments**

Socrates believed that the wise person would instinctively lead a frugal life. He himself would not even wear shoes; yet he constantly fell under the spell of the marketplace and would go there often to look at all the wares on display.

When one of his friends asked why, Socrates said, "I love to go there and discover how many things I am perfectly happy without."

## **28. What you give, you'll receive**

A farmer got so old that he couldn't work the fields anymore. So he would spend the day just sitting on the porch. His son, still working the farm, would look up from time to time and see his father sitting there.

"He's of no use any more," the son thought to himself, "he doesn't do anything!" One day the son got so frustrated by this, that he built a wood coffin, dragged it over to the porch, and told his father to get in.

Without saying anything, the father climbed inside. After closing the lid, the son dragged the coffin to the edge of the farm where there was a high cliff. As he approached the drop, he heard a light tapping on the lid from inside the coffin. He opened it up. Still lying there peacefully, the father looked up at his son. "I know you are going to throw me over the cliff, but before you do, may I suggest something?" "What is it?" replied the son. "Throw me over the cliff, if you like," said the father, "but save this good wood coffin. Your children might need to use it."

## **29. The best tea**

There was a group of elderly gentlemen in Japan who would meet to exchange news and drink tea. One of their diversions was to search for costly varieties of tea and create new blends that would delight the palate.

When it was the turn of the oldest member of the group to entertain the others, he served tea with the greatest ceremony, measuring out the leaves from a golden container. Everyone had the highest praise for the tea and demanded to know by what particular combination he had arrived at this exquisite blend.

The old man smiled and said, "Gentlemen, the tea that you find so delightful is the one that is drunk by the peasants on my farm. The finest things in life are neither costly nor hard to find."

## **30. Archery Mastery**

The master at the school for archery was known to be a master of life just as much as of archery.



One day his brightest pupil scored three bull's-eyes in a row at a local contest. Everyone went wild with applause.

Congratulations poured in for pupil -- and master.

The master, however, seemed unimpressed -- almost critical even.

When the pupil later asked him why, he said, "You have yet to learn that the target is not the target."

### **31. The weather I like**

Traveler: "What kind of weather are we going to have today?"

Shepherd: "The kind of weather I like."

Traveler: "How do you know it will be the kind of weather you like?"

Shepherd: "Having found out, sir, that I cannot always get what I like, I have learned to always like what I get. So I am quite sure we will have the kind of weather I like."

### **32. The monk and the river**

One day a young Buddhist on his journey home, came to the banks of a wide river.

Staring hopelessly at the great obstacle in front of him, he pondered for hours on just how to cross such a wide barrier. Just as he was about to give up his pursuit to continue his journey he saw a great teacher on the other side of the river. The young Buddhist yells over to the teacher, "Oh wise one, can you tell me how to get to the other side of this river?" The teacher ponders for a moment looks up and down the river and yells back, "My son, you are on the other side."

### **33. The black belt**

A martial artist knelt before his master sensei in a ceremony to receive the hard-earned Black Belt. After years of relentless training, the student has finally reached a pinnacle of achievement in the discipline.

"Before granting you the belt, you must pass one more test," the sensei solemnly tells the young man.

"I'm ready," responds the student, expecting perhaps one more round of sparring.

"You must answer the essential question, 'What is the true meaning of the Black Belt?'"

"Why, the end of my journey," says the student. "A well-deserved reward for all of my hard work."

The master waits for more. Clearly, he is not satisfied. The sensei finally speaks: "You are not ready for the Black Belt. Return in one year."

As the student kneels before his master a year later, he is again asked the question, "What is the true meaning of the Black Belt?"

"A symbol of distinction and the highest achievement in our art," the young man responds.

Again the master waits for more. Still unsatisfied, he says once more: "You are not ready for the Black Belt. Return in one year."

A year later the student kneels before his sensei and hears the question, "What is the true meaning of the Black Belt?"

This time he answers, "The Black Belt represents not the end, but the beginning, the start of a neverending journey of discipline, work and the pursuit of an ever-higher standard."

"Yes," says the master. "You are now ready to receive the Black Belt and begin your work."

### **34. Learning**

A little bear cub was confused about how to walk. "What do I do first?" he asked his mother. "Do I start with my right foot or my left? Or both front feet and then my back feet? Or do I move both feet on one side and then both feet on the other?"

His mother answered, "Just quit thinking and start walking."

### **35. The fisherman and the businessman**

One day a fisherman was laying on a beautiful beach, with his fishing pole propped up in the sand and his solitary line cast out into the sparkling blue surf. He was enjoying the warmth of the afternoon sun and the hope of catching a fish.

About that time, a businessman came walking down the beach trying to relieve some of the stress of his workday. He noticed the fisherman sitting on the beach and decided to find out why this fisherman was fishing instead of working hard to make a living for himself and his family.

"You're not going to catch many fish that way," said the businessman, "You should be working harder rather than laying on the beach!"

The fisherman looked up, smiled and replied, "And what will my reward be?"

"Well, you can get bigger nets and catch more fish!" was the businessman's answer.

"And then what will my reward be?" asked the fisherman, still smiling.

The businessman replied, "You will make money and you'll be able to buy a boat, which will then result in larger catches of fish!"

"And then what will my reward be?" asked the fisherman again.

The businessman was beginning to get a little irritated with the fisherman's questions. "You can buy a bigger boat, and hire some people to work for you!" he said.

"And then what will my reward be?"

The businessman was getting angry. "Don't you understand? You can build up a fleet of fishing boats, sail all over the world, and let your employees catch fish for you!"

Once again the fisherman asked, "And then what will my reward be?"

The businessman was red with rage and shouted at the fisherman, "Don't you understand that you can become so rich that you will never have to work for your living again! You can spend all the rest of your days sitting on this beach, looking at the sunset. You won't have a care in the world!"

The fisherman, still smiling, looked up and said, "And what do you think I'm doing right now?"

### **36. The weight of a snowflake**

"Tell me the weight of a snowflake," a coal-mouse asked a wild dove.

"Nothing more than nothing," was the answer.

"In that case, I must tell you a marvelous story," the coal-mouse said.

"I sat on the branch of a fir, close to its trunk, when it began to snow - not heavily, not in a raging blizzard - no, just like a dream, without a sound and without any violence. Since I did not have anything better to do, I counted the snowflakes settling on the twigs and needles of my branch. Their number was exactly 3,741,952. When the 3,741,953rd dropped onto the branch - nothing more than nothing, as you say - the branch broke off."

Having said that, the coal-mouse flew away.

### **37. The ocean**

Once upon a time, a young fish asked an old fish: "Everyone talks about this thing they call 'ocean.' What the heck is it?"

The older and wiser fish answered: "The ocean is this thing that surrounds you on all sides."

The younger fish didn't understand: "There's nothing around me! Why can I not see this 'ocean?'"

"Of course you cannot," the old fish was patient. "The ocean is both inside and outside of you. You were born in the ocean and chances are you will die in it. The ocean flows around you, just as your own skin does."

Confucius once said, "Fish forget they live in water; people forget they live in the Tao." We all live in the ocean of Tao. It flows over us; it is within us and all around us. It enfolds us like our own skin, and yet we cannot perceive it... indeed, most of us have no idea what it is. Let us think of Tao as the universal flow of reality. This will take us another step toward true understanding of Tao.

### **38. The Present Moment**

A Japanese warrior was captured by his enemies and thrown into prison. That night he was unable to sleep because he feared that the next day he would be interrogated, tortured, and executed. Then the words of his Zen master came to him, "Tomorrow is not real. It is an illusion. The only reality is now."

Heeding these words, the warrior became peaceful and fell asleep.

### **39. Looking Good**

A Zen abbot went dressed in rags to the door of a rich man and was turned away with an empty bowl. So he returned in his formal robe of office and was invited in and served a sumptuous meal.

Removing his robe and folding it, he placed it on front of the feast and departed with the words, "This meal is not for me; it is for the robe."

### **40. Blind man with lantern**

An old Zen master always told this fable to unserious students: Late one night a blind man was about to go home after visiting a friend. "Please," he said to his friend, "may I take your lantern with me?" "Why carry a lantern?" asked his friend. "You won't see any better with it." "No," said the blind one, "perhaps not. But others will see me better, and not bump into me." So his friend gave the blind man the lantern, which was made of paper on bamboo strips, with a candle inside. Off went the blind man with the lantern, and before he had gone more than a few yards, "Crack!" -- a traveler walked right into him. The blind man was very angry. "Why don't you look out?" he stormed. "Why don't you see this lantern?"

"Why don't you light the candle?" asked the traveler.

### **41. The Ghost**

The wife of a man became very sick. On her deathbed, she said to him, "I love you so much! I don't want to leave you, and I don't want you to betray me. Promise that you will not see any other women once I die, or I will come back to haunt you." For several months after her death, the husband did avoid other women, but then he met someone and fell in love. On the night that they were engaged to be married, the ghost

of his former wife appeared to him. She blamed him for not keeping the promise, and every night thereafter she returned to taunt him. The ghost would remind him of everything that transpired between him and his fiancée that day, even to the point of repeating, word for word, their conversations. It upset him so badly that he couldn't sleep at all. Desperate, he sought the advice of a Zen master who lived near the village. "This is a very clever ghost," the master said upon hearing the man's story. "It is!" replied the man. "She remembers every detail of what I say and do. It knows everything!" The master smiled, "You should admire such a ghost, but I will tell you what to do the next time you see it." That night the ghost returned. The man responded just as the master had advised. "You are such a wise ghost," the man said, "You know that I can hide nothing from you. If you can answer me one question, I will break off the engagement and remain single for the rest of my life." "Ask your question," the ghost replied. The man scooped up a handful of beans from a large bag on the floor, "Tell me exactly how many beans there are in my hand."

At that moment the ghost disappeared and never returned.

#### **42. Full awareness**

After ten years of apprenticeship, Tenno achieved the rank of Zen teacher. One rainy day, he went to visit the famous master Nan-in. When he walked in, the master greeted him with a question, "Did you leave your wooden clogs and umbrella on the porch?"

"Yes," Tenno replied.

"Tell me," the master continued, "did you place your umbrella to the left of your shoes, or to the right?"

Tenno did not know the answer, and realized that he had not yet attained full awareness. So he became Nan-in's apprentice and studied under him for ten more years.

### **43. In Your Hands**

A young man caught a small bird, and held it behind his back. He then asked, "Master, is the bird I hold in my hands alive or dead." The boy thought this was a grand opportunity to play a trick on the old man. If the master answered "dead", it would be let loose into the air. If the master answered "alive", he would simply wring its neck. The master spoke, "The answer is in your hands".

### **44. The camels division**

A father dies leaving instructions that his 17 camels are to be split up between his 3 sons as follows:

Half the camels are to go to the eldest son, a third of the camels are to go to the middle son and a ninth of the camels are to go to the youngest son.

Failing to think of a way of carrying out split, they sought help from their wise but poor uncle. Their uncle arrived on his tatty old camel. He said, "I'll lend you my camel, then you'll have 18, and you should be able to divide them up without difficulty." So the eldest son chose his 9 camels, the middle son chose his 6, and the youngest chose his 2 camels. The uncle then got back on his camel (which no-one wanted) and went home.

### **45. Paradise**

Two people are lost in the desert. They are dying from hunger and thirst. Finally, they come to a high wall. On the other side they can hear the sound of a waterfall and birds singing.



Above, they can see the branches of lush trees over the top of the wall. Their fruit look delicious.

One of them manages to climb over the wall and disappears down the other side. The other, instead, returns to the desert to help other lost travelers find their way to the oasis.

#### **46. Heaven and Hell**

There was once a samurai who wanted to learn the difference between heaven and hell. He sought until he found a master from whom he thought he could learn. He stood before the Master and asked him what was the difference between heaven and hell. The Master took the samurai's sword and, turning it to the flat of the blade, struck the samurai on the head. The samurai was surprised at this but chose to ignore it. He thought that the Master had failed to understand his question. He once again asked the Master about the difference between heaven and hell. Again the Master struck the samurai on the head. The samurai staggered back and puzzled over this. He approached with his question for a third time and, before he could utter a word, the Master struck him a third time. The samurai was now so enraged at this behaviour that he grabbed his sword from the Master, raised it over his head and was prepared to bring it down on the Master's head when the Master raised one finger and the samurai paused.

"That is hell," said the Master.

The samurai was instantly so overcome by the courage of this frail old man - to have risked his life for the sake of a stranger's question - that he fell to his knees and bowed before the Master.

"That is heaven," said the Master.

#### **47. Purpose**

"A man came into a community of stone cutters. He asked a man, that looked very unhappy, what he was doing. "I'm cutting stone," he replied. Then he asked a man, who looked somewhat satisfied. "I'm earning money to ensure a good life for my family," answered the second man. Then he asked a third man, that looked very enthusiastic about his job, what he was doing. "I'm building a cathedral!" he answered."

What's the difference between the three men, who were doing the same job? The power of asking why and finding a purpose in/for what you do.

#### **48. Be the boss**

A horse suddenly came galloping quickly down the road. It seemed as though the man had somewhere important to go. Another man, who was standing alongside the road, shouted, "Where are you going?" and the man on the horse replied, "I don't know! Ask the horse!"

#### **49. Time to Die**

Ikkyu, the Zen master, was very clever even as a boy. His teacher had a precious teacup, a rare antique. Ikkyu happened to break this cup and was greatly perplexed. Hearing the footsteps of his teacher, he held the pieces of the cup behind him. When the master appeared, Ikkyu asked: "Why do people have to die?"

"This is natural," explained the older man. "Everything has to die and has just so long to live."

Ikkyu, producing the shattered cup, added: "It was time for your cup to die."

#### **50. Harmony**

There is the story of a young martial arts student who was under the tutelage of a famous master.

One day, the master was watching a practice session in the courtyard. He realized that the presence of the other students was interfering with the young man's attempts to perfect his technique.

The master could sense the young man's frustration. He went up to the young man and tapped him on his shoulder. "What's the problem?" he inquired. "I don't know", said the youth, with a strained expression. "No matter how much I try, I am unable to execute the moves properly". "Before you can master technique, you must understand harmony. Come with me, I will explain", replied the master.

The teacher and student left the building and walked some distance into the woods until they came upon a stream. The master stood silently on the bank for several moments. Then he spoke. "Look at the stream," he said. "There are rocks in its way. Does it slam into them out of frustration? It simply flows over and around them and moves on! Be like the water and you will know what harmony is."

The young man took the master's advice to heart. Soon, he was barely noticing the other students around him. Nothing could come in his way of executing the most perfect moves.

### **51. No Work, No Food**

Hyakujo, the Chinese Zen master, used to labor with his pupils even at the age of eighty, trimming the gardens, cleaning the grounds, and pruning the trees.

The pupils felt sorry to see the old teacher working so hard, but they knew he would not listen to their advice to stop, so they hid away his tools.

That day the master did not eat. The next day he did not eat, nor the next. "He may be angry because we have hidden his tools," the pupils surmised. "We had better put them back."

The day they did, the teacher worked and ate the same as before. In the evening he instructed them: "No work, no food."

## **52. Real Prosperity**

A RICH MAN asked Sengai to write something for the continued prosperity of his family so that it might be treasured from generation to generation. Sengai obtained a large sheet of paper and wrote: "Father dies, son dies, grandson dies."

The rich man became angry. "I asked you to write something for the happiness of my family! Why do you make such a joke as this?"

"No joke is intended," explained Sengai. "If before you yourself die your son should die, this would grieve you greatly. If your grandson should pass away before your son, both of you would be broken-hearted. If your family, generation after generation, passes away in the order I have named, it will be the natural course of life. I call this real prosperity."

## **53. Right & Wrong**

WHEN BANKEI held his seclusion-weeks of meditation, pupils from many parts of Japan came to attend. During one of these gatherings a pupil was caught stealing. The matter was reported to Bankei with the request that the culprit be expelled.

Bankei ignored the case.

Later the pupil was caught in a similar act, and again Bankei disregarded the matter. This angered the other pupils, who

drew up a petition asking for the dismissal of the thief, stating that otherwise they would leave in a body.

When Bankei had read the petition he called everyone before him.

"You are wise brothers," he told them. "You know what is right and what is not right. You may go somewhere else to study if you wish, but this poor brother does not even know right from wrong. Who will teach him if I do not? I am going to keep him here even if all the rest of you leave."

A torrent of tears cleansed the face of the brother who had stolen. All desire to steal had vanished.

#### **54. When Tired**

A student once asked his teacher, "Master, what is enlightenment?"

The master replied, "When hungry, eat. When tired, sleep."

#### **55. Loyalty.** Walter MacPeck

One of the two brothers who were fighting in the same company in France was hit by a German bullet. The one who escaped asked his officer's permission to go and get his brother. "He's probably dead," said the officer, "and there's no point in risking your life to bring his body back." But after further pleading, the officer consented. Just as the soldier reached the lines with his brother on his shoulders, the wounded man died. "You see," said the officer, "you risked your life for nothing." "No," replied Tom. "I did what he expected of me, and I have my reward. When I came to him and took him in my arms, he said, 'Tom, I knew you'd come, I just felt you'd come.'

## 5.5 Oxymoron

An oxymoron is a literary figure, widely used in rhetoric, which consists of using two concepts of opposite meaning in a single expression generating a third concept. If you've got this far I think you won't have too much difficulty digesting content in English or Spanish and accepting my judgement or disagreeing::

- Act naturally.
- Agnóstico integrista
- Aldea global
- Alone together.
- Amazingly awful
- Amor libre
- Appear invisible
- Awfully delicious
- Awfully good
- Awfully lucky
- Awfully pretty
- Big baby
- Calma tensa
- Carne vegetal
- Ciencias ocultas
- Clearly confused
- Copia original
- Crecimiento negativo
- Cruel to be kind

- Dark light
- Deafening silence
- Definitely maybe
- Destrucción creativa
- Disgustingly delicious
- Dulce condena
- Dulce amargura
- Farewell reception
- Gentil descortesía
- Growing smaller
- Heavy diet
- Humble narcissism
- Ir a ningún sitio
- Jumbo shrimp
- Least favorite
- Líder anarquista
- Living dead
- Llenos de vacíos
- Luz negra
- Me encuentro perdido
- Menos es más
- Muerto en vida
- New Normal.
- New freedom
- Noticeable absence

- Old news
- Only choice
- Open secret
- Opinión objetiva
- Original copy
- Organised mess
- Pain for pleasure
- Painfully beautiful
- Passive aggressive
- Pequeño gran hombre
- Pretty cruel
- Pretty fierce
- Pretty ugly
- Prohibido prohibir
- Quiet presence
- Random order
- Realidad virtual
- Religión verdadera
- Run slowly
- Secreto a voces
- Seriously funny
- Short wait
- Small crowd
- Si pero no
- Silencio atronador



- Small crowd
- Sociedades unipersonales
- Solo en la multitud
- Strangely familiar.
- Sweet agony
- Tolerancia cero
- True myth
- Única opción
- Valiente cobarde
- Vía muerta
- Victoria amarga
- Virtual reality
- Wake up dead
- Walking dead
- Weirdly normal
- Worthless gold

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