

# The Cartography of Hell

*by Jekyll*

It's very easy to describe your surroundings. When someone gets themselves all sorted out, they look around themselves and see the simplicity of things, the easy truth about form and function. They see the simple truth about how we monkeys can mesh so easily with each other, the simple truth about the world, and it is so easy to forget all the shit they had to soldier through to get there.

That path was paved in pain, paved in struggle and in the face of constant failure. Each brick needed to be laid by hand. The road you travel from fear and isolation to strength and connection seems so simple when it's finished. But when you're building it, it is hard sometimes to see anything else but the endless work involved in sorting things out.

It's easy for those who have turned their lives around to look back on their past from a position of strength and see how all the fears that held them back were ultimately so pointless, so unreal. It is an easy trap to fall into, I think, to tell others to simply get over themselves, to face up to the fact that they have nothing to bitch about, and to just get out there and learn the skills they need to succeed.

But this, I think, is an illusion. C. S. Lewis makes a point brilliantly in a book called *The Great Divorce* about this psychological phenomenon. It is an amazing book, it's what started me looking at philosophy in the first place. Lewis has a lot to answer for. The book is about the difference between heaven and hell. Hell, he says, seems so big when you're in it. All the little excuses we build around ourselves seem so important to us when we're unhappy. They seem like the most important things in the world. They all seem so right, so powerful. So real.

When we live in fear, our minds fill out the universe that we perceive in terms of that fear itself. Everything is harsh and cold. Like fear. Harsh and cold. But then of course, once you get yourself strong, the gaping chasm of fear shrinks down to a mere crack in the pavement and you can see that all the terrors that held you back have no reality at all.

The emotional charge of everything you perceive around you is dictated by your emotional core.

When your emotional core is filled with strength, the whole world becomes friendlier, brighter, filled with opportunity. Everything is smooth, and cool. People like you, and things seem to fall into place. You find it easy to be effortlessly calm and easily expressive in the presence of the people you want to impress, be they beautiful women or amazing men. You deal with worries like you'd bat away a troublesome fly, and you love the thrill associated with challenge. You feel confident. Sometimes you even feel cocky, but you never get lost in the cockiness, because you feel so centred. Life is good.

When your emotional core is filled with fear, the whole world becomes colder and darker, filled with dangers. Everything is jagged, and all the edges cut you. People are distant and threatening, and it takes a monumental effort of will to appear normal so they will interact with you in a positive way. Your mask keeps slipping, and even when it is in place, the relationships that you have, be they with your friends or lovers, seem to stand on a knife's edge.

All the things that matter to you are fragile, and your life becomes a matter of juggling an ever increasing number of hugely important juggling balls. If you take your eye off them for one second and one falls, it smashes into pieces and takes your heart with it.

As a man living in fear, beauty paralyzes you. The attention of a stunning woman is literally stunning. It's like staring into the eyes of a Gorgon, you are petrified and held rigid in place by the fear you feel. You can only move and speak through a conscious effort of will. You have to force yourself to interact, and thus the interaction seems forced. You can only speak normally through a monumental commitment to training yourself to act normal under the onslaught of terror that consumes you.

It's not just women. It infects every aspect of your life. Sometimes to a greater degree, sometimes to a lesser degree, but the influence of fear is always there, clogging your mind, wrecking the subtleties and nuances of which you are capable of perceiving and expressing. You do not fight to fulfill the dreams you have because you see them as mere fantasies. You panic more than you need to. You panic at

everything. Small problems turn quickly into fiascos and crises. Sometimes it feels like there are no small problems, just a never ending, expanding list of insurmountable obstacles that hem you in like the bars of a cage. You feel trapped. Trapped and alone.

Whenever you feel satisfied, which doesn't happen very often, you cling to that feeling like it's a piece of driftwood in an open sea. When you really have made an achievement against all odds, the magnitude of what you have done perverts the feeling of strength you would normally get from the feeling of achievement. Your state of mind exaggerates the satisfaction you feel into a world-encompassing arrogance. So even when you do well, your victories become just one more wall that separates you from the people around you.

You are never centred. You wouldn't know what being centred looked like if it slapped you in the face. And sometimes, just sometimes, you look back on a night in with the people you love and you think how great it was just to chill. Just to be free. Just for one night to have to stop fighting so goddamned hard to keep your head above water.

And worst of all? You are alone.

Your loneliness eats you up inside sometimes. The more it pulls at you, the harder you try to build that mask of normality, to build that mask of happiness and strength to cover the seething mass of fear that boils beneath it threatening to blow the lid off everything like a pressure cooker left on too long.

To my recollection, that is what it feels like to be unhappy. That is what it feels like to live in fear. It is a terrible thing, a terrible and powerful trap. The reason I wrote this piece is not so that I could describe it from memory, but so I could explain what it is psychologically, and also to explain the route out of it. For the sake of convenience, and as something of a homage to my hero, C.S. Lewis, I'm going to refer to this negative state of mind as hell.

Hell seems so big when you're in it. All the world is hell when you live in fear. All your hopes and dreams are bittersweet, for you know in your heart that you'll never accomplish them. They exist only to lift you up in your mind for a while until the crushing weight of reality pulls you back down. Until the nastiness of the world you live in wakes you up to smell the coffee. Until the shittiness of reality brings you back to the terrible truth – that in a world of chaos, there is no purpose to anything. Not your hopes. Not your friendships. Not your lovers. Not even you.

Listen to me, and read the next words very carefully. Hell is not real.

Hell isn't real. It's not. It is a psychological phenomenon that gains power in a very specific way – a way that you can combat. Fighting your way out of it is hard, but worthwhile. Staying inside it is easy, but horrific. I'm not telling you to fight. That is your choice. I cannot make it for you. What I can say is that if you put off this battle now, you will find it easier to put it off next time. If you never fight, you will live your life in hell. You will die in hell. I can't tell you what will happen after that. You work it out. But remember – this is about now. This is about the life you live here, on earth, in hell. No one can pull you out. Not your friends, not your family. Not me. Your friends and your family can support you in the fight. I can give you a map of the battlefield. But I cannot throw your punches for you. Your demons are your own. You have to fight, or they will win. That is the choice you face.

The geography of hell is as complex as it is convincing. It is infinitely complex. It is infinitely convincing. It seems like all the world. It seems limitless. It seems real. There are very specific reasons for this, and I'll go into them right now.

Essentially, what you are experiencing is an evolutionary survival response that is an integral part of the psychological makeup of even the most balanced and confident human being. I don't believe that there's any point in saying here that hell is, in and of itself, a bad thing. I believe that, for me, it is horrific. But in and of itself, it simply is what it is. You can decide for yourself what internal world you wish to inhabit. I've made my choice. But this isn't about me. It's about people in general, and if you're a person, it's about you.

The psychological phenomenon that I refer to as hell derives from fundamental aspects of the human mind that are common to us all. These aspects all exist for a reason – as evolved creatures, all the different parts of our minds have evolved to be of immense use to us as individual creatures. When they

all work as nature intended, the human animal becomes a juggernaut of brilliance. But if these parts of the mind are working against each other, it is always to the detriment of the individual involved. When taken to extremes it can be completely crippling. It is my opinion that the mental illness known as manic depression (also known as bipolar disorder) is nothing more or less than what happens to a person when the negative psychological processes I'm about to describe have taken hold to an extreme degree.

As far as I can see, there are three main parts to the human mind. One is emotional. One is rational. One is expressive. They appear to be distinct, but obviously they interact in incredibly complex ways and to draw a clear dividing line between the three can be difficult. Nonetheless, I'll talk about the first two in this article.

I believe you experience your emotional mind largely as (obviously) the feelings that you have. Your rational mind is somewhat more tricky, but its basic task appears to be the categorisation of reality. Your rational mind defines things. That's pretty much what it does. The information that flows into your mind through your senses is just a feed of data. Your rational mind defines what you see in reality by breaking up the information coming in into constituent parts. In this, it seems to have a kind of semi-autonomous decision-making process. But this is an illusion.

It breaks up the world into pieces and parts which logically follow on from and connect with the pieces and parts already in place. Clearly, the only time that this is impossible is with newborn babies where there are no rational concepts set and in place. I'm not sure how the mind forms initially, because to be honest with you, the specifics of child psychology are not really my area of expertise. Perhaps infants do nothing more or less than just try to emulate their parents, get love from them and try to make sense of what they see around them. This could be how the process begins. Nevertheless, if you are old enough to read this, the process has well and truly taken hold in your brain, because otherwise you wouldn't be able to read.

Once the information about the world is broken into parts, the rational mind ascribes limits around these parts, boxing them up into what we experience as concepts. It then draws links between these concepts, defining the relationships between them. It defines these relationships, again, by ascribing limits to them. Then, it builds models of reality using the defined concepts as bricks and the relationships between them as mortar. These models can be, and almost always are, unbelievably sophisticated. Nonetheless, they retain several key features of the concepts and relationships of which they are constructed.

Firstly, these models are static. Secondly, these models are limited. Finally, these models are inventions of the human mind, and as such, they have no reality in and of themselves. They are, essentially, thoughts about the way things are.

I'll go through these qualities one by one and explain what I mean.

## I

Firstly, static. When our rational minds break down our sense perceptions into concepts, they do so in a very specific way. They draw dividing lines. They draw dividing lines around a concept, and divide that concept from the rest of reality so we can interact with it, intellectually, as an autonomous unit.

These concepts can be very simple. The concept of a chair, for instance. Pretty simple concept. I would define a chair, in my understanding, as anything specifically designed by someone for the primary purpose of seating one person. It has to be designed – a tree stump that is great for sitting on is not a chair. Also, a chair has to have been constructed primarily for the purpose of sitting in. Although a chair can do other things, the primary purpose behind its design must be to seat one person. You can get chairs with back massagers and beer fridges built in, but all of these features are incidental to its primary purpose. Finally, a chair is only designed to seat one person. You could fit more than one onto it if you wanted to, the chair was big enough, and you didn't mind the squeeze, but if it is built to seat two or three people, it's a couch.

Pretty straightforward. There are many kinds of chairs. Shitloads of them. They come in different shapes, sizes, colours, and features. You get rocking chairs, wooden chairs, armchairs – I think you get my point.

In reality, these things are a massive number of atoms and molecules, subatomic particles and, at a quantum level, probability functions. Did you know that if you look at the chair you're sitting on right now, at the exact place where your arse meets the surface of the chair, there is no place on an atomic level where you can actually say – "here is where the chair ends and the arse begins?" The atoms of each blend into each other. There is no dividing line. There is no division in reality. It's all just atoms and stuff.

So what are we doing when we look at that shaped mass of atoms upon which, dear reader, your posterior rests? We're slotting it into a static concept so we can interact with it as a separate entity.

And that concept is static. No matter how wild, weird or wacky the chair, the concept of 'chair' remains the same. Exactly the same. It just does not change, not at all.

Now that is weird. Everything in the universe, everything in reality, is changing all the time. Moving through time, aging, decaying. Perhaps if whatever we're considering is alive it is moving and growing. But even if we've frozen something in a cryogenic tank of liquid nitrogen, it is still changing, slowly, at a molecular level.

Even if you freeze something to absolute zero, and even in a pure, totally empty vacuum, there is change. It is called vacuum energy, and plays itself out as minute fluctuations in probability at a quantum level.

So nothing is static. Nothing except our thoughts about the world. Interesting. All static concepts are by definition, incorrect. They can never nail reality, because reality is moving and they are not. Even this work I'm writing about the human mind cannot take into account the fact that evolutionary change is shifting us all, incredibly slowly, at every level. But hell, I'm not worried. It should be pretty accurate for the next few hundred thousand years. Heh heh.

When we use these concepts to build larger, more sophisticated models of reality, those models are static also. The more sophisticated the model, and the more of the world it has defined and categorised within itself, the more we see the world in static terms. This is not necessarily bad, as the minute changes in the world around us like the ones I mentioned earlier, like aging, evolution, quantum fluctuations and atomic movement are far too large or too small to perceive. This process of categorisation therefore, is actually really effective for interfacing with the world around us as we see it.

"So what's the problem, and where's my point?" I hear you cry. Well, it's simple. Very simple. The human mind is a rapidly changing and unbelievably dynamic system of interlocking faculties and facets, and as such, no individual person can be categorised in this manner. Not me, not you. We are, quite simply, too dynamic for any static model to ever fully encompass. Sure, as human beings we are all basically the same machine. And sure, that machine has some pretty straightforward fundamental dynamics, and these can be understood at a basic level.

But no-one, unless something really amazing happens that I simply cannot foresee, will ever make anything that comes within a million miles of even approaching a complete analysis of even a single human mind. I am looking at just three parts of the mind – its core, our personal psychological health and how we interact with the world around us. Each of these areas is, in and of itself, infinitely complex, and their interactions infinite also. Yet they remain based on fundamental principles that are understandable in a straightforward sense. And even though those principles can be understood and do indeed operate upon straightforward principles, they are nowhere near as straightforward a thing as, say, a chair.

So when we turn our analytical minds inward and attempt to number crunch ourselves, we get hopelessly lost extremely quickly. As an academic exercise, I believe philosophy to be the most difficult thing that a person can do. To attempt to make sense of the shifting infinity of the human condition using your own dynamic mind as the tool with which to do so is a little like trying to hit a black-clad ninja straight between the eyes with a hand-held catapult when each of you is on separate ships in a stormy sea.

But we're not talking about academics. We're talking about life, about happiness, about horror and hell. If your self-image is something that you build yourself with your rational mind, it will be static. Because of this, you will see yourself as contained by a static concept which defines you. It is all you are. It as-

cribes limits to your worth. It ascribes limits to your abilities. It ascribes limits to your faculties and your future. It boxes you in. It makes you finite. It suffocates your potential. It sets bars around your humanity. It sucks you down.

## II

The static models we build of the world are limited. A concept exists only because of the dividing lines that make it separate from other concepts and the world at large. A thing is this and not that because it possesses qualities that are that and not this. The only existence that concepts have, psychologically, is in the divisions that define them. These divisions are set, they are static, and thus rigid. Now, normally these models and the concepts and relationships which comprise them can be altered in a very specific way. This is how we learn. We hone and build our models so that they become more sophisticated and allow us to better interact with the world in which we live. It is possible to come up with a new concept or model by drawing new dividing lines, to refine or expand an existing concept or model by adding further divisions to it, or to throw a concept or model out wholesale. So a model can and does change over time.

But with all this change, how can it be said that these models are limited?

The divisions that make them up are rigid, absolute divisions. These divisions are, fundamentally, binary. The binary system at the heart of the human mind is not between one and zero, like a computer. It is between one and infinity. The failure to get this is, I think, why computers simply cannot match the human mind for versatility or ability to interface with the environment. This may be a good thing. We've all seen Terminator.

So – the binary system at the heart of the rational process. To put it plainly, the human mind does not separate things into one thing and another thing. It separates them into one thing and everything else. This difference is massive and pivotal. It is how our minds interact with the world. Take a jar of pasta sauce, for instance. In reality, at an atomic level, there is no dividing line between that jar and the world around it. They are all part of an infinite reality, and as I mentioned before, there is no division in that reality. What our rational minds are doing is using the divisions that define concepts to bracket 'things' off from the whole of reality so we can interact with them as individual parts, even though in truth they are not. This allows us to interact with small, neatly categorised sections of reality, and not just the whole thing all at once.

This is why human beings can interact with their environment to a level that is simply without parallel in the animal kingdom.

We can use this to do loads of things, such as, for instance, making some spaghetti bolognese. The important thing to remember is that we do not categorise things because of their difference from other stuff we have already categorised. We categorise a thing in its own right, as something distinct from the reality that surrounds it. I mean, sure we draw the dividing lines that define that thing based on what we know already from life. And sure, we then assign meaning to it based upon the model of the world we have built so far. But the fundamental distinctions that build a concept are put together as tools to separate it from the roiling mass of reality around it.

Something is either this or not this. The same or other. Accurate or inaccurate. True or not true. One thing, or everything else. One or infinity. Binary.

There is no middle ground. Even the concept of 'maybe' is defined by rigid divisions which separate it from the concepts of 'certainly' and 'never'. The binary nature of these divisions means that the concepts built out of them, and the models built out of those concepts have an absolute quality to them that is an inescapable characteristic of what they are.

Why are they like this? Well, evolutionarily it would make sense that the monkeys best able to interact with their environments in useful ways would be the most useful monkeys to ally with. They would therefore be selected by the best of their group as the monkey with which to ally, and they would prosper on an individual level. Thus there was a strong evolutionary pressure to be able to interact with the world in effective and useful ways.

The models you build of the world around you are tools. They are evolutionary tools, like your hands and feet, which allow you to interact with the physical world around you. That is their purpose. To draw distinctions between things, bracket them up into concepts and build those concepts into models just so you have enough of an understanding of the world to be able to interact with it in a positive way. So basically, the reason everything is so absolute when it comes to the models is that there is no real evolutionary value in building better and better models in your head in order to 'get closer to the truth'. The only value this whole process has in evolutionary terms is when these models allow us to get things done in the real world. They allow us to achieve complex tasks, which not only aids our survival but the survival of our allies.

A common philosophical misconception is that because there are many truths about any single thing, we can never reach a real or exact understanding of anything. The first part of this sentence is true, the second, false. It is true that there are an infinity of different things you can say about any one thing, and all of them are true. But this does not necessarily lead to the conclusion that therefore all truth is relative and as such, non-existent.

This is basically because there is only one totally correct answer to any question. You can never understand the entire truth about any part of reality, because to do so would mean asking an infinite number of questions about it. But you can ask specific questions about these parts and answer those questions completely. This is because there are limitations inherent in the concepts of which all questions are comprised.

All the questions that we ask are limited by their very nature. They have to be, because they are built from static, limited concepts. They proceed from discrepancies and loose ends in the models we build of the world. So if I ask something like "What is kindness" or "what are the basic dynamics of humanity?", each of these questions are constructed of static concepts, such as 'kindness,' 'basic,' 'dynamics,' and 'humanity'. The answer therefore, can be exact and correct within the parameters of the question set. By asking rational questions about reality, we are setting the finite terms for the answers to those questions to be themselves limited and rational, yet also to perfectly correspond with the reality around us within the limits implicit in the question.

I guess it's just a case of knowing what to ask, having the balls to ask it and having the strength of character and insight to punch through the shit till you find the truth. And of course, never resting your self image on any of the insights that you get or your identity as someone who has the balls to seek the truth. Oh yeah, and not getting caught up on the importance of an idea that seems so wonderfully true, no matter how much you want to hold on to it with all your heart.

So we can come to real answers to the questions we're prepared to ask. It's not easy, but we can. The reason it isn't easy is that understanding the truth about the world is not the primary purpose of the rational mind. The rational mind builds models of the world which serve as tools to allow us to interact with it in new and creative ways. The models we build are tools, that is their evolutionary purpose, and that is the evolutionary value of them. Otherwise they are just thought patterns that bounce around inside a person's head, and of no use to anyone. Thoughts that do not help you to interact with the real world have no benefit in helping you to survive, or to reproduce. This means that evolutionarily, they are dead ends.

This is, incidentally, why geeks are not attractive to the opposite sex. An intelligent person is not necessarily a geek. A geek is not necessarily intelligent. A geek is someone who gets sucked in to refining their rational models of the world for their own sake – which while having massive benefits from the point of view of modern technology and other such modern wizardry, is a lonely kind of existence. People just aren't attracted to you – men as friends or women as lovers. They are calibrated to feel that you have no evolutionary value because the models that you are refining have no obvious practical applications. It's a little like seeing someone polishing their glasses incessantly but never putting them on.

But to be honest, being a geek is, although not much fun, a lot easier of a trap to climb out of than that of defining yourself by a set and limited identity. Attempting to define one's self by a set identity or concept is an extremely easy thing to do. It's a very subtle step to take, and one that is often taken for moral reasons, but nevertheless it is critically and necessarily destructive of the things inside you that give you strength.

If you define yourself by any static concept, be it your race, your gender, your social status, your wealth, your success, your beauty, your charisma, your intelligence, your nationality, being a martyr, being a hero, a specific skillset or a specific level of knowledge that you have in a certain thing, you are cutting away the infinite power of your humanity. You are crippling yourself. You are closing off unexplored avenues of your potential that you will never even know about, let alone realise.

So do not try to define yourself by swearing your allegiance to anything that defines you entirely. It will destroy you entirely. That is the way of things.

### III

The third and final quality of the models that we have in our minds which we will examine in this article (and yes, there are many others) is the fact that they are not real. They have no reality. They exist in reality only as electrochemical impulses in the lump of meat that's sitting on top of your neck. What this means is that if you look at any of these concepts important in it's own right thing and strive for it directly, you are striving for a fiction, you are striving to become something that has no existence. If you look at any of these concepts and attack it as the most evil thing that exists, again, you are attacking a fiction. Committing yourself to doing either will simply destroy you. You get what you look for. If you seek to become something that is fundamentally empty and hollow, you yourself will reach that goal.

And sure, there are things in this world that are fantastic, and sure, there are things in this world that are terrible. But if you get fixated upon the importance of any specific thing, you will be subtly consumed by a destructive addiction in which your entire internal world of thought is re-calibrated in terms of the emptiness of the thing you seek. This is what obsession is. As I mention elsewhere, we choose the meaning of our own lives. It is an incredible gift to have such monumental power over our own existence, but as with any awesome power it can be terribly destructive. If you choose something real, something awesome, you will save your life and be a force for massive good in the world. If you choose to make the meaning of your life a set ideology, a set of religious regulations, a set of beliefs whatever they may be – even atheism – you will destroy yourself and remain in hell forever. It's just the truth. You can't stop it.

If you turn your rational mind outward, you can change the world. If you turn it inward, your destruction is guaranteed.

When you lose yourself to a static concept, even if it is something as subtle as your image of some individual as 'all you need to be happy,' or your image of yourself a 'pickup artist,' or your rage at something that a person has done, you are stepping into a psychological world that is built of limitations.

This is a subtle process, especially in the early stages. But it is a slippery slope, and there is no preset limit in reality that dictates how far you can fall. There are no limits in reality. It's a little tricky to get your head around, but to sum it up in a sentence, I would say that you can be consumed by limitations to a limitless degree. You may know people who are like this. People who only see the world in terms of moral absolutes, who only see the world in terms of what they can't do. And the strange thing is that although you can get positive and negative concepts – compassion would be a positive concept and depression would be a negative one, for instance – the people who only see the world in terms of set concepts are pretty much universally unhappy.

A world of limitations, harsh edges and rigid definitions of right and wrong is a cold and horrible place to live. And while even in hell you can and will have flashes of happiness that arrive like momentary breaks in the cloud cover, you know at some level that all the happiness that you have is fleeting and transitory. This is because when you are trapped inside a rational model of your own construction you see the world in terms of limitations, and so anything good in your life is bittersweet, for you know it must end, and you see that ending as the end of all the happiness in your life. In truth, if you are deep inside of hell, it probably is. Do not try to cling to the things that make you happy. Fight the things that bring you down.

I remember one time, years ago, when I was walking hand in hand down the street with the first girl I fell in love with. I was very young, 19 at the time, but she was my whole world. She made everything bright and wonderful. And I remember thinking that at some point during the evening, she was going

to have to go home. It made me so sad, and she sensed that. She asked me what was wrong, and I told her, I told her I was sad because I knew she'd have to go away at some point that night. She looked at me like I was from Mars. I could see that she just could not understand why I was putting a negative slant on our time together. She just didn't think like that. That was not the world in which she lived. She lived somewhere better. For a time, when I was with her, I was able to share glimpses of a world magnificent and exquisite in its wonder and beauty.

Setting limitations on positive things is immensely damaging to their positivity. Limitations on negative things just add to their complexity and scale. This is the mechanism of chronic unhappiness. It is lose-lose situation. You cannot think your way out of hell. The divisions that your thoughts are making kill the power of the good things in your life, and add weight and the illusion of reality to the things that drag you down. Chronic unhappiness and chronic negativity are caused by plunging into a world that is built, at a fundamental level, from divisions. Any further divisions you make to the world around you – any by that I mean any new concepts that you come up with at all, simply add to the sophistication and credibility of the model that is pulling you down. And they pull you away from the real things in your life that will give you joy, like real love and true friendship, because these things are real, and there is no division in reality.

Unfortunately, the further you plunge into the static models you build, the easier it becomes to rapidly categorise the feelings inside you in terms of static concepts. These are often concepts linked to the idea of justice. Basically, life seems very unfair. If you catch yourself saying this, railing against life for the unfairness of the chaos around you, stop. You have to stop. There are things in this world that are terrible, and things that are horrific. There are crimes so despicable that it would make you break out in a cold sweat just to read about them. I personally find that the holocaust always gets this reaction from me. But these these things are not fair or unfair. They are, very simply, tragic.

It's okay to be sad. Just don't get lost in railing against the universe for it's random nature. The universe just is. It simply exists. Getting angry at reality for the shit you encounter within it is like getting angry at an earthquake for taking your house apart. Mourn the loss you've suffered. Don't feel that being sad is a sign of weakness, it is not. It is a part of your humanity. It will happen. Accept that. But for the love of God, build yourself a new house – and this time build it stronger than last time, so that next time the ground shakes, your house stays up.

Never analyse the things that give you joy. Just be happy they exist. Revel in them. Become lost in joy. It's great fun.

Just don't get lost in the things that at one time or another triggered joy within you. Those 'things' have no reality. If you chase them, you will get lost in a jagged abyss of loneliness and self-hate. It sounds dramatic, and it doesn't start as anything that big. You just get locked into a process which feeds off itself, a process with no upward limit in terms of scale. It can consume you. It will consume you if you let it. And this is not because you are weak, or because you are in some way less than the others around you – it is just the inescapable truth of what happens to a person who follows the concepts they seek as if those concepts had any reality of their own. Seeing as it is those concepts that are the only way we can interface with reality at an intellectual level, it is an easy mistake to make.

This goes for any concept. Even positivity itself, as a concept, has no reality. You cannot get by just by looking on the bright side. A relentlessly positive outlook is a blunt instrument with which to deal with the shifting infinity of the life you lead. This is only incidentally to do with other people and your impact upon them. It has to do with you, and how you feel inside. How strong you are. How happy and successful your life will be in the long term. And the short term too.

Embrace the full spectrum of your humanity. It is fashioned by evolution to make you strong. When everything is in sync, you will become a powerhouse of happiness, evolutionary value, and positivity. But that happiness, value and positivity will just rise from inside you because of magnificence and wonder of the life you live. You will not impose it upon your feelings from the outside. It will be an inescapable part of your life. And shit – who'd want to escape from that? Positivity rocks.

So those are three key facets of the models we build of the world around us which lead inescapably to the conclusion that if you allow yourself to see those models of the world as reality, you will destroy yourself. This is not an academic issue. This is to do with you as a human being. Your life, such as it is. All the problems you face and the gifts you've been granted by your evolutionary heritage can either crush you completely or lift you up, higher than you knew any person could go.

This is the situation you face. It is a situation you face because you are a human being, and these things are hardwired into you by four million years of evolution. You cannot escape it, any more than you can run away from your own legs. So what is the answer? How, with all these monumental traps, pitfalls and downward spirals around you can you hope to transcend the shit you're dealing with right now?

I mention this elsewhere. In order to overcome all this shit and to turn it into something useful, something great, you have to get yourself out of the shit you're in. There's no fancy way to do that, not that I've ever discovered. There is only one effective way that I know of. Only one way to attempt something as audacious as attempting to change your life that promises any real chance of success.

Fight.

Fight as hard as you can. Face your fears. Fight your fears. Fight the fears that stop you from having the courage to truly express what you want to say. It takes a lot of courage to be honest. Fight your fear, so that you can genuinely express your amazing and beautiful self.

In hell, you define yourself and the people around you in terms of static, limited, artificial concepts. 'Good person.' 'Bad person.' 'Friend.' 'Enemy.' Because you have defined them as static, artificial and limited concepts, you automatically treat them as 'things' – because static concepts are intended by nature to denote inanimate parts of the world around you.

Being manipulative is a symptom of being in hell. But It is also a cause. Treating people like objects is bad for you. Not bad for them. Not bad in some vague moral sense. Treating people like objects is massively damaging to your emotional health, your happiness, and the wonderful future you may yet grasp. It is, perhaps, the most insidious of all of hell's tricks – to pull you in by putting manipulative people in your path and making you think of them as nothing more than obstacles to your life. They may well be obstacles to your life. But that is not all they are. They are human beings with the full emotional range of their inherited humanity.

Even the most sadistic, evil criminals and butchers in the world's history were people, just like you, and just like me. They were lost in hell. That is why they brought hell to the world by their actions. Their internal world was as cold and as heartless as horror they brought to the lives of others. Inasmuch as this is true, there is a kind of natural, inescapable justice to the human condition. Your selfish acts destroy you, even as they get you closer to the things you think you want. At the same time, you must be always mindful not to follow them into hell. Empathy is your only defence against this. Force yourself to empathise with the people you hate, and even if you simply cannot conceive of a world in which their horrific actions could ever be justified, rest assured that such a world does exist. It is the world in which they live. And it is rigid, static and artificial. Leave them to it. You have bigger fish to fry.

Your fear is your compass – the things you are afraid of will always be the things that you need the most to confront to make yourself happy. Don't dodge around them. Don't work out coping strategies. Fight them like a fucking nutter. Fight them until you have beaten them all to death with the sheer force of your will, your courage, and all of the amazing strength of character that your evolution has placed at your disposal.

And about that strength of character? It is there within you. I know sometimes it does not feel that way, but just for one second step back from yourself and think. Every single ancestor that you've ever had had pretty intense shit to deal with at some point or other in their lives, and they dealt with it. They dealt with it in a multiplicity of different ways, but in the end all of the things they did to get that next generation up and running were made possible through their strength of character, strength which just enabled them to keep on going. To stay in contention, no matter the odds weighed against them. You have four million years of evolution backing your personality. You can afford to have a little more faith in its durability than perhaps you do.

Your self doubt is, to be honest with you, fucking laughable. It's just stupid. Self doubt is, by definition, wrong. This is because your self is strong. Your 'self' is the only part of you that you never have to doubt. It has to be. Four million years of evolution have fashioned it as the keystone of the human animal's success. Our entire bodies have evolved around the needs of our personalities. Our bodies are strong, but flesh can be injured so badly it cannot recover. A mind can suffer the most extreme of traumas, traumas that would reduce the body to a fine white ash, and reconstitute itself stronger and better than before. This is because it is strong. And not strong like stone, or even steel. It is strong like diamond.

You experience this strength of character as a choice. From your point of view, that is all it is. Just a choice. It is the choice you make when you stand on the brink of giving up. The choice to turn back from the edge and pick up all the pieces of your life, and try to build something with them, or to take that step over the edge, and just give up the fight. To get busy living, or get busy dying. It is the only choice we face. Make your choice. Commit yourself to whichever one you want. I cannot tell you what to choose, and I cannot choose it for you.

So yes, a choice. Always a choice, and always the same choice. Strength of character is what we call the quality of a person who just decides not to quit when all logic and reason is telling you that you should quit. And let me just quickly say something about that. If logic, reason, or any other thing or person inside you or in the world you live is telling you to give up on yourself, just fucking don't. Just don't listen. Fuck logic. Fuck reason. Fuck anything that tells you that you should give up on being happy. If we want to, if we just keep deciding not to quit at every step of the way, the things we can survive and achieve would take your breath away.

Your strength of character is, in real terms, limitless. As long as, no matter what, you just keep choosing to fight on whenever you are faced with the choice to fight on or surrender, you will never run out of fire with which to fight.

Never give up. Fight. Never stop fighting. Fight your fears. Face the things that terrify you. Write a list then punch through it one by one if you have to.

Or just pick the biggest one and go for it like it's the thing that's always ruined everything good in your life. Because you know what?

It is.

It just is.