

# The Sensible Observer

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## Philosophical Questions Answered

### The Doctor is **OUT**

**Last Updated: Tue, Feb 25, 1997**

(This date is also printed on our [Guide to Knowledge Page](#).)

#### Essays

1. [What is the meaning of life?](#) (11/24/96)
2. [What Motivates Human Behavior?](#)
3. [Does there exist a single, objective reality in which we can someday achieve consensus, or is it all subjective?](#)
4. [Why do people often sabotage themselves?](#)

[Unanswered Questions](#) submitted by readers.

(Note: Submission of new questions has been suspended for now.)

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## Questions Mildly Answered

*Below are questions submitted by users and the Observer's preliminary thoughts on them. These responses may be expanded into essays later. The latest observations appear at the top.*

- **How do we know our true life's work?** (12/31/96)
- **What is the best way for a man to discover personal fulfillment?** (2/5/97)

You don't have to know your "true life's work." All you have to do is look around at the real problems facing you and solve them as best you can.

Don't think big; think small. First thing to be concerned about is whatever you are doing right now and how to do it more efficiently. You face certain obligations right now that you can't easily avoid. Just to get through today alive is the first challenge. Once you master that, you can start looking ahead to future days. You can ask yourself where you will be in ten days if you continue along your present path. Where can you reasonably get to in this time, and what can you change right now to make your life in ten days more comfortable.

You don't have the luxury of thinking about your "true" or absolute destination, because frankly, you haven't got much time left on earth. You have to work with whatever resources and circumstances available to you right now, and mold them into something that will make you more comfortable in the long run.

What do I mean by "comfortable"? It is simple: You know there are certain circumstance that make you happy with yourself and things that make you depressed, because you have had plenty of experience with both. All you have to do now is plan your future to maximize the circumstances that make you more content and minimize your depression. The trick, of course, is figuring out what the real source of your contentedness or depression is. Chocolate or flower might make you happy on one occasion but not on another, and it may take a while to figure out the essential elements of the experience that work. (Hint: Long term comfort has something to do with mastering your circumstances and seeing your life with increasing objectivity.)

Once you learn to plan ahead for the next ten days, you can start looking ahead for longer periods and defining more subtle distinctions of comfort.

A simple guideline for now is, "Simplify, simplify, simplify." The more effecient you make your life now, the better prepared you will be for whatever challenges you face in the future, even if you don't know what that future will hold.

(2/15/96)

- **What is art?** (2/5/97)

- **When does a man know he is truly a man?** (2/10/97)

These are semantic questions. They are asking for the definitions of words, and words can mean anything you want them to. You might as well ask, "What is kifwiplebog?" or "When does a migrewt know he is truly a migrewt?" I suggest consulting your favorite dictionary.

Who cares how you define words. Being a "man" or "not a man" has no bearing at all on how you respond to a given problem, like it has no bearing on whether  $2 + 2 = 4$ . You simply have to make the most logical choice in whatever equation you are currently evaluating.

The observer has some opinions about what we commonly call "art": Art is useless if it just sits there. Unless it teaches you something, helps you simplify yourself and helps you better deal with the future, don't bother with it. There are more productive things to spend your precious time on.

The observer can answer only questions that have some bearing on future actions.

(2/15/96)

- **Why do people sometimes become obsessed?** (12/31/96)

Sometimes obsessions are merely a chemical problem. Some of the absurdly obsessive thoughts associated with obsessive-compulsive disorder, can be accounted for by an imbalance of neurotransmitters. Some people can't stop washing their hands, and others can't rid their minds of an inane thought or phrase. Take your pills, and the problem is brought under control.

But that's probably not the kind of obsession you are talking about. You mean, "Why do I sometimes become obsessed with a certain goal, knowing in the back of my mind that it isn't an effective use of my resources?" The simple answer is ego. To abandon the goal, you would have to admit defeat and acknowledge that "they" were right about you: You are worthless.

What you can't acknowledge is that by the time you achieve the goal, what "they" think may not matter anymore, and you have expended your resources on a course of action that wasn't the best for you.

The trouble when you are obsessed is that you tend to approach your goals in a linear fashion. If there is a mountain in front of you, you'll push ahead and try to climb directly over it instead of standing back and looking for an easier way around. You *must* get to your destination, and if there are enormous barriers in your way, you

will expend enormous resources to overcome them. If you are less obsessed, you are more likely to see what it is you *really* want and find easier ways to get there.

Obsessions can start with sexual attraction because there is a lot of ego wrapped up in that pursuit. If you are rejected in romance, especially on grounds that are disturbingly close to truth, you want to prove to that person that they were wrong, wrong, wrong! You can become obsessed with that person directly, hounding them again and again for a date, or you can fixate on a goal that you think will impress them -- slaying a dragon, perhaps, or becoming a movie star. (Freudians might call this "sublimation.")

**>>> In Japan, a woman is arrested for calling up the man who spurned her and hanging up -- 10,000 times!**

An unhappy childhood generates similar obsessions. You want to prove that "they" were wrong about your worthlessness, so you strive, by hook or crook, to reach the pinnacle of some highly visible profession. Hollywood is the Mecca for such obsessions, but any business can also provide these illusory goals. You seek power to try to prove your worth, whether or not you know what to do with that power once you get it.

Some people are obsessed with winning. Give them a contest, and they'll obsessively pursue victory, whether or not the prize is really worth anything.... (2/4/96)

- **Do humans really have the power to choose one's response in any given situation?** (1/3/97)

What do you care about "humans"? Some humans can control themselves; some can't. All that matters to you is whether *you* can choose your response to any given situation. Of course you can. That doesn't mean you can make the world and your own body do anything you want them to. You have to understand the mechanisms of the world and tailor your responses accordingly.... (2/4/96)

- **Do I exist?**

Do you have any better theory? I *seem* to exist, and I seem to have some control over my surroundings, so this is the only theory I can work with at the moment. The only alternative is to pretend not exist and lie in bed all day. Hey, maybe life's an illusion, but it beats watching television.... (2/4/96)

- **Who is the original man?** (1/10/97)

Huh? Who cares? Do you mean "Which came first, the chicken or the egg?" Such a question is way too deep for this practical philosopher.

I guess humanity probably had a history before I arrived on earth, and I know you can learn things by studying *recorded* history. What happened before that isn't relevant to me right now. Did God create Adam, or was it the aliens? Reliable evidence is lacking at the moment, so I'll have to soldier on without knowing.... (2/4/96)

- **Is the ultimate choice in life whether to rebel, or conform along with the absurdities of the establishment?** (2/1/97)

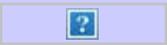
It is probably not the ultimate goal. The ultimate goal is to do the best with the resources you have. First of all, you have to understand the establishment. Then you can decide, in any given situation, whether it would be more productive to rebel or conform.

There is no sense in rebelling if it isn't going to achieve any worthwhile goals. You have to calculate how the establishment is going to react to your rebellion. Sometimes a well-design revolt is just what you need to get the changes you want.... (2/4/96)

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