

[Essay]

Meaning and Fulfilment in Life

The Roles of Criticism, Self-Discovery and Autobiography

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Abstract

I offer a personal case-study to show how poor self-knowledge due in part to self-deception led to wasted life, a life lacking in meaning, and descent into severe anxiety and depression. A meaningful human life connects with things of value outside of itself and provides fulfilment for its bearer. For humans, fulfilment depends upon self-discovery, which requires a process of conjecture and refutation, a willingness to question and criticise received views and to welcome challenges and criticism to views that one holds dear and that may seem to be part of one's identity. When one pursues an organised project of self-discovery, living one's life is intertwined with drafting a philosophical autobiography.

1. Introduction

Two connected challenges of living a human life are meaning and self-discovery. A significant element of a meaningful life is self-fulfilment, which depends upon self-knowledge; and since such knowledge is not inborn, it depends upon self-discovery. If self-discovery is to be carried out effectively, it must be conducted in an organised and critical way, which in turn demands written analysis and reflection. Since meaning and fulfilment are issues of a philosophical nature, the effective pursuit of them in life is connected with writing a philosophical autobiography.¹

I was enjoying success when my happiness turned gradually into bewilderment. My life seemed to be empty; I seemed to be lost. Misunderstanding my situation I made a calamitous attempt to remedy it. As a consequence I was hurled into a state of severe anxiety and depression with accompanying bruxism (uncontrollable jaw-clenching and teeth-grinding), all of which got progressively

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¹ For some aims of philosophical autobiography that are similar to these, plus some others, see Mathien 2006.

worse over the next two-and-a-half years. The bruxism gave me loose and chipped teeth, receding gums and prominent jowls which uglified my previously pretty face; all of which reinforced my anxiety and depression. Repeatedly I tried to understand how I had got into such a mess and how I could get myself out of it; and repeatedly I failed. I thought that I no longer knew who I was or what I wanted to do. In the depths of misery, and in the hope that it might help me to recover, I began writing an analytical history of my life to try to discover who I was, or who I should be, how I had got to where I was and what I should do next. Simultaneously with my commencement of that work I began a gradual recovery; though, of course, correlation does not prove causation.

The advantage of analysing one's life when one is depressed is that one takes a dim view of everything, including oneself, so one is far more able to be self-critical rather than self-justifying, and thus to identify and learn from past mistakes. After two years, I had completed the personal history, in that I had got up to date; but although I had learned a lot, I was still puzzled about myself and both unclear and misguided about my future. The problem was that, even in my depressive state, the scope of my self-criticism had been limited by a recalcitrant self-deception. It took another five-to-eight years of slow recovery combined with more open-minded experimentation before I got free of the self-deception and discovered who I am and thus how I could live a fulfilling life. In 2016, I returned to the personal history, reviewed it critically in light of more recent experience and re-worked the material into a philosophical autobiography.²

That autobiography describes the trajectory of my life and pauses intermittently to discuss various issues of a philosophical nature as they arise. This essay is more focused in that a few aspects of my life that are described in detail in the autobiography are here summarised briefly in order to illustrate, or to make concrete, the discussion of five philosophical issues that were given brief or no consideration in the autobiography. The first of those issues concerns meaning in life and how its absence may be experienced. That issue is covered in the autobiography but it is stated more carefully and succinctly here in section 2, which shows how, despite my success, my life lacked meaning and how self-deception led to my downfall. The next three issues, which are dealt with in section 3, below, concern self-deception, the dependence of fulfilment on self-discovery, and the importance for both of holding all one's views open to criticism.

² Summer (2017).

I point out in the autobiography that self-discovery depends upon trial and error. Below, I relate that to the difference between persons and non-personal animals and I give a step-by step account of how an individual person should set about the task of discovering herself. I also offer a new analysis of self-deception in terms of ad hoc manoeuvres made to avoid anxiety; and I illustrate it with a personal example from the autobiography. I go on to stress the importance, for self-discovery and the avoidance of self-deception, of holding all one's views open to criticism and I relate it explicitly to my earlier failures and later success in achieving meaning and fulfilment. Finally, in section 4, I conclude and I introduce the fifth philosophical issue, namely, the connection between pursuing an organised project of self-discovery and writing a philosophical autobiography.

2. Meaning and its Absence

When I was forty I was an unhappy man. I was dissatisfied with my job, which rarely achieved positive results. I felt humiliated by my salary. I was persistently bullied and harassed by my manager. I hated the travel to and from work: it could take me two hours to get home through the London traffic in the evening. At home I was continually bombarded with noise from the televisions of my next-door neighbours, which I could hear loudly and clearly in every room in my house, from before I got up in the morning until after I went to bed. I had to wear ear plugs to get to sleep, but the plugs would become loose during the night. I had no close friends. I did get on well with some of my work colleagues but I did not often socialise with them outside of work. The old friends with whom I was still in touch no longer lived in London, though I did meet them periodically. I was writing articles and pamphlets for a political association, but when I went to meetings of the group I was unable to establish a rapport with any of the other members. I was ambivalent about being single: I loved the freedom and independence while I felt the absence of a soul-mate.

I decided that things had to change. I taught myself accountancy from books, studying in the evenings and most weekends, despite the noise of the televisions next door. I sat and passed all the exams, completing what is normally a four-year course in less than two years. While studying I was applying for jobs as an accountant outside of London. I wanted a detached house, so that I could be free of neighbour noise; but there are not many detached houses in London and I could not afford them anyway, so I had to move into the provinces. Shortly after I passed

the final accountancy exams I obtained a job as an accountant at a county council in the English midlands.

Nineteen months later, having just turned forty-four, I was at the peak of my success and happiness. I enjoyed my job, which was high-profile, had a lot of responsibility, paid well and was often fun. I took my job seriously and I was treated with respect. Travel to and from work was easy, quick and cheap: just a five-minute walk. I lived in a large, detached house with a huge back garden. The house was usually beautifully peaceful. I was still single. I had for some years been highly sexually active and promiscuous. I met sexual partners, whom I entertained at my home, via a contact magazine. Usually they were men, occasionally they were male-and-female couples. I regarded myself as bisexual, though I had sex almost always with men. When I was younger, I had regarded myself as purely heterosexual. I was a masochist and a transvestite: I always dressed as a girl for sex, even when there was a woman involved. My sex with the women was limited: I gave oral sex to some, some sodomised me using a strap-on or hand-held dildo, some thrashed me, some just watched as I was used sexually by their boyfriends. I had no shortage of the sort of sex that I desired but, apart from that, I had little social life. I still met up, from time to time, with two long-standing friends in different parts of the country. That was social life enough for me because I liked to spend a lot of time reading, thinking and, sometimes, writing, which I could do in a relaxed fashion in my peaceful house. All in all, I was very happy. When I left work in the evenings, I was elated: I felt like singing and dancing my way home.

Then came an uneasy feeling of being lost or without purpose. I had achieved all that I had set out to achieve less than four years before. Further, I was becoming disillusioned with my work. The stated purpose of my job was to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the organisation for the benefit of the local taxpayers and service users; but it was becoming clear that, in practice, I was a pawn in a political game. The councillors were interested in my painstaking and sophisticated option-appraisals only when they could be used to defend policies or proposals that the councillors already intended to adopt to try to improve their electoral prospects. In addition, I had ceased writing articles and pamphlets for my political group, so I no longer had goals to pursue in creative writing. Consequently, I was without worthwhile future achievements for which to strive. Also, the peace for which I had sought for fifteen years, and finally achieved, was destroyed when the teenage girls in the house next door acquired CD-players.

My sexual relationships were all casual. My meetings with my two old friends were occasional and given over to drunkenness, so they were devoid of deep interpersonal connection. I did not often see any of my family. My father was dead. I visited my mother in London occasionally, but she was destroying herself with alcohol. Any interpersonal relationship with her was difficult, had been so for some time, and would soon become impossible. My relationships with my work colleagues were purely business. In consequence, I had no meaningful relationships. I could quite often be seen drinking alone in pubs in my county town or in the nearby villages.

I was therefore lacking in all four of the prime ingredients of a meaningful life. The first three of those ingredients are goals to strive for, goals attained, and interpersonal connection, where at least some instances of those three contribute to the good of other persons, either directly, or indirectly by producing, for instance, knowledge or art that others can access. A life with those ingredients connects with something of value and contributes to something greater than itself.³ The fourth ingredient of a meaningful life is fulfilment, that is, realisation of one's nature.⁴ I was frustrated in achieving fulfilment by my lack of self-knowledge. I had theories about who I am, about what my nature is, but they were significantly mistaken. Although I had been an academic in the past, I did not realise that I was by nature an academic, that I needed to be involved in investigating theoretical problems, evaluating competing solutions, and trying to create and appraise novel solutions of my own. I was also, through self-deception, mistaken about my sexuality. Although I regarded myself as bisexual, I distanced myself from the homosexual transvestite who lived my sexual life, which is why I kept my sexual relationships casual. I kidded my friends and family that I was heterosexual. I had gradually revealed to them that I was interested in sado-masochism, but in such a way as to suggest, without saying, that my interest was in dominating and punishing women. I seem even to have kidded *myself* that my homosexual transvestism was an aberration that would right itself when I managed to find a compatible female partner.

Thus, my lack of self-knowledge, due in part to self-deception, had resulted in my life lacking meaning, leading to uneasy feelings of purposelessness, perplexity, disorientation, emptiness, loneliness, uselessness and dissatisfaction.

³ Frankl (1959); Nozick (1981), pp. 594-600, 610-613; (1989), pp. 167-169; Russell (1967), p. 9; see also the discussion of John Stuart Mill's 'crisis' in Wilson (2006), pp. 181, 188, 192-195, 204.

⁴ Fromm (1947); Gewirth (1998); Humboldt (1969), pp. 10-15; Mill (1859), chapter 3.

Worse still, in response to those feelings, my lack of self-knowledge, particularly the self-deception about my sexuality, led me to take action that made things immeasurably worse. For I came to the conclusion that what was missing from my life was a 'normal' sexual relationship with a woman. A fumbled and failed attempt to initiate such a relationship then propelled me into a trauma of depression, anxiety and bruxism from which I could not escape, in large part because I could make no sense of my situation.

3. Criticism and Self-Discovery

A non-personal animal, such as a cow, follows its instincts and, under favourable circumstances, it thereby lives a life in accord with its nature and finds the fulfilment appropriate to its kind. In contrast, persons live not merely by instinct but also by critical thought. That enables them to question and criticise the kinds of lives being lived by themselves and by other people and to search for something better.⁵ Even a person who is satisfied with her life can wonder whether another kind of life, perhaps one that she knows is being lived by some other people, may suit her better. She is unlikely to be able to answer that question simply by reflecting on it: her knowledge of her nature is to that extent incomplete. As a consequence, in order to realise her nature and achieve fulfilment and a fully meaningful life, a person must set out to discover what her nature is. Since a person's nature is a complex thing, knowledge of it can normally be achieved only in stages. The greater the knowledge a person acquires of her nature, the greater her chance of living a fulfilling life, other things being equal.

A person setting out to discover her own nature, who she is, unavoidably begins with the theories and practices to be found in her own society. By the time she is able to raise the question of what her nature is, of what sort of life will fulfil her, she has typically been schooled in the ways of her society: she has learned, and normally largely follows, the customary ways of behaving and she interprets the world by means of a framework of theories that is more or less common to people in her society or, at least, in her social circle. She is thus already living a life of a specific kind; she is aware of a range of different kinds of life being lived by various people in her vicinity and in the wider society; she has heard of, and may be familiar with, some kinds of life that bring misery in their train; and she

⁵ Popper and Eccles (1977), pp. 144-147.

has a more or less defined set of options for kinds of life to live that seem to be open to her. She also holds some theories about herself, her likes and dislikes, her strengths and weaknesses, and the kinds of lives that might fulfil or frustrate her. Some of this information about herself will derive from people who are close to her, particularly her parents or carers, other significant relatives and teachers. If she is inquisitive and, especially, if she has an education, she will also be, or become, familiar with other kinds of life lived by people outside of her social circles and even outside of her society. She may encounter the work of historians, anthropologists, biographers, novelists, pornographers, poets, playwrights and other dramatists; she may also see or hear people through the popular media who are living alternative lifestyles. She may even learn about herself from these sources: for example, she may be surprised at how she identifies with the character in a novel and the unusual kind of life that character lives.

This accumulated knowledge will give her various, sometimes rival, theories about who she is, who she can be and how she should live. In order to discover herself she must subject these theories to criticism and testing. In large part that will be prompted by inconsistencies between the theories themselves or between some of the theories and other parts of her background knowledge. Her criticism of inherited theories may suggest to her ideas for some new types of life that no one has lived before; and those ideas should be subjected to criticism too. She should then be able to put the different types of life that she has discovered into a preliminary order according as they are more or less likely to be fulfilling for her. The most promising such theories should then be subjected to empirical testing. The critical test for whether a kind of life will fulfil a particular person is for that person to try living that kind of life and then to see whether she finds it fulfilling.

Where there are great risks or heavy costs involved in experimenting with a particular kind of life, she may instead experiment with a less risky or less costly approximation to it, which may yield her sufficient information either to rule out that kind of life, or to indicate that it is worth bearing the risks or costs of experimenting with it more fully. If the experiment with a particular kind of life does not go well, either because she was not capable of it or because it did not fulfil her, or for some other reason, she should try to understand why. That will enable her to learn lessons from the experiment that can assist her in thinking up or in evaluating other kinds of life and which can thereby inform the selection of the next kind of life to be trialled.

At every stage of criticism and testing she must beware of ad hoc

manoeuvres.⁶ An ad hoc manoeuvre is one that saves a favoured theory from being rejected either by ignoring evidence against it or by explaining that evidence away using explanations that are untestable or refuted or never tested. An explanation is untestable if there is no conceivable observation that we could make, with our actual powers of observation, that would conflict with it.⁷

The testing of a theory about the kind of life that will fulfil a person, by that person living that kind of life and then seeing how fulfilled she is, requires that she be able to recognise whether, or how far, she is fulfilled. That may often be a complex judgement. It seems that a person's sense of fulfilment will involve the presence or absence of the following: feelings of satisfaction or dissatisfaction, intimations that something is missing from one's life, a sense of achievement, knowledge of difficulties overcome, feelings of accomplishment or frustration, awareness of lessons learned or knowledge gained, cognisance of scope for further opportunities for achievement or self-development, and a sense of overall rightness or fittingness or contentment.

It was my failure to hold all my views open to criticism that *both* led to me living a life lacking in meaning *and* prompted me to turn my quandary into a calamity. The theories about how I should live that I inherited from my upbringing were a mixture of those adhered to by my parents and other significant family members and those that were generally endorsed in working-class households in London in the 1960s and 1970s. They included the theories that having fun means getting drunk, that men ought to be heavy drinkers, that I am a tough-guy, and that homosexuals, transvestites and masochists are figures of fun at best, and contemptible, disgusting or evil at worst. I was reluctant to subject those theories to criticism. I simply accepted them. As a result, I wasted years being drunk and being aggressive, I acquired numerous injuries, some of them severe, and I avoided killing or maiming people only through extraordinary moral luck. I knew that I had a very strong desire to dress as a girl, I sometimes secretly borrowed the clothes of one of my sisters, and I recurrently entertained homosexual or masochistic fantasies. However, I failed to consider whether these facts about myself constituted evidence against my inherited theories about the abominable nature of homosexuals, transvestites and masochists. Instead, in an ad hoc manoeuvre, I ignored the conflict. I also, in my twenties, rejected numerous valuable opportunities for sexual exploration involving transvestism,

⁶ Popper (1959), sections 19-20, pp. 57-63.

⁷ Popper (1959), sections 6 and 21, pp. 17-20, 64-66.

homosexuality or masochism.

At the age of twenty-seven, after six years of heavy drinking and persistent drunkenness, I reflected on my lifestyle and experiences. I concluded that drunkenness is a waste of life; yet, in another ad hoc manoeuvre, I later ignored that refutation of one of my inherited theories when I had opportunities for drunken revelry, and eventually I forgot about it, continuing to get drunk regularly until I was forty-six.

I had discovered my need for philosophical reflection, problem-solving and writing in my late teens and early twenties; but when, at the age of twenty-three, I split up with my live-in girlfriend, I abandoned my studies and got a job as a barman. I returned to academe five years later, only to renounce an academic career, at age thirty-two, to seek a life as a high-earning, heavy-drinking, womanising tough-guy. I continued to hold on to my inherited theories about myself despite the knowledge I had gained about my nature that showed them to be false – another ad hoc manoeuvre.

I started seeking men for sex in my early thirties. In my late thirties and early forties I was having sex with innumerable men while I was dressed and made-up as a girl. Simplifying somewhat, the situation regarding my knowledge of my sexuality was as follows. I adhered uncritically to a theory that I had acquired from the culture of my youth, namely:

(T1) every man ought to enjoy penetrating women vaginally, orally and anally with his penis.

I also accepted that I am as I ought to be. I drew the obvious conclusion:

(T2) I enjoy penetrating women vaginally, orally and anally with my penis.

I had, through research undertaken in my late thirties, come to accept that, while there may be some people who are purely heterosexual and some who are purely homosexual, the vast majority are bisexual, with some being more heterosexual than homosexual, and others being vice versa. So the innumerable observation statements describing my sexual antics with men were not inconsistent with (T2). However, because women found me attractive and I was in contact with many attractive women, there were myriad apparently true observation statements of the

form:

(O) here is an opportunity for me to have sexual relations with an attractive woman.

The fact that I did not take up any of those opportunities seemed to refute (T2). However, given (T1), the falsehood of (T2) implied that I am not as I ought to be. That implication caused me a good deal of anxiety. I had two options for relieving the anxiety. Either I could reject (T1) or I could save (T2) by rejecting each of the observation statements of type (O). My uncritical adherence to (T1) led me to take the second option. In every case I concluded that what had seemed to be an opportunity for sexual relations with an attractive woman was really not so. In some cases closer inquiry had enabled me to find a reason for thinking that the woman was not so attractive after all, while in other cases I managed to find a reason for thinking that the woman had rejected me. However, in almost every case, these manoeuvres were ad hoc: the explanations for why the observation statements of type (O) were false were either not testable or not tested by me. Here is just one example. In a pub one evening there was an attractive young woman who had been making eyes at me for a few weeks. An AC/DC record was playing and I was singing along to it. 'Shut up!' she shouted across to me. I recognised that it was an attempt to get my attention but I interpreted it as showing that she was nasty. A more plausible explanation was that she was inept. But I never interacted with her to test which, if either, of those explanations was the true one; I just accepted an explanation that enabled me to write her off.

Since I was saving (T2) by means of ad hoc manoeuvres, I was accepting it uncritically. Thus, there were two irrationalities at work. First, I was deceiving myself because I made *ad hoc manoeuvres* to save (T2) in order to avoid the anxiety of rejecting the proposition that I am as I ought to be. Second, the ad hoc manoeuvres were required for that purpose only because I *accepted uncritically* (T1).

If I had held all my views open to criticism, I would have checked whether the explanations that saved (T2) from refutation were testable. If they were not I would have rejected them. If they were, I would have tested them and in most cases refuted them and thus rejected them. I would thus have avoided the self-deception and rejected (T2). My anxiety about whether I am as I ought to be would then have led me to turn my attention to (T1) and view it critically. Given that I

accepted that people occupy positions on a spectrum of bisexuality and that some people are wholly, or almost wholly, homosexual, I should then have rejected (T1) as false, because 'ought' implies 'can.' I would thereby have relieved my anxiety and obtained a true view of myself.

The self-deception had two regrettable consequences. First, I got involved in many flirtations and attempted dalliances with women which were abortive and caused upset for the women and for me. Second, I never pursued any serious relationships with my male sex-partners, remaining distant or detached, and even ceasing to see men who wanted or tried to develop the casual sexual relationship into a friendship or a love affair. As a consequence I was living a kind of life in which I lacked meaningful interpersonal connection.

My failure to subject inherited views to criticism thus led me to neglect the most important parts of my nature, namely, the academic and the sexual parts. Without better self-knowledge, without self-discovery, I could not find fulfilment or meaning in life. I could have avoided becoming lost in a meaningless life and the subsequent hell of depressive anxiety and bruxism if I had in earlier years adopted a more organised, critical and self-conscious approach to self-discovery. That would have enabled me to acquire knowledge of my nature which could have informed my decisions about what lifestyles and careers to pursue. It is striking that I failed to apply what I had learned, as a student of philosophy, about the importance of criticism and the avoidance of ad hoc manoeuvres, to the project of self-discovery. The problem was that I had no project of self-discovery. Like many analytic philosophers and economists, I seemed to think that our selves are transparent to ourselves, simply a locus (or even a bundle) of beliefs, thoughts, desires, 'preferences,' emotions and other mental states that are available to introspection. On that view, what need could we have for a *project* of self-discovery?

As I recovered slowly from my trauma, a reorientation toward academic study along with disillusionment with my job and loss of career ambitions led me to resign from work and live off my savings. The academic study was inseparable from writing down my thoughts and I was soon writing academic articles, almost forty of which have been published (under a different name) in peer-reviewed academic journals, including some top-rated journals. While I was studying and publishing I was also coming gradually to accept myself as being a homosexual, masochistic transvestite, in part through rediscovering the philosophy of Karl Popper, which emphasises the importance of holding all one's views open to

criticism, and in part through meeting a man with whom I had a couple of casual sexual encounters followed by a pen-friendship that later turned into a sexual friendship. Eventually, I agreed to submit to him as his submissive girlfriend as an experiment which turned into a long-term, loving relationship. The relationship is good for each of us. It is the most intimate relationship I have ever had: Sir is the only person to whom I have been able to reveal myself fully. Both he and I accept me as I am. Accordingly he permits me to pursue my academic studies, through which I make contributions to the growth of knowledge, which gives me a connection with something of value. I thereby provide good for others as well as achievements for myself and I have future goals for which to strive. In consequence I have attained self-fulfilment and a meaningful life – so long as I am not deceiving myself.

4. Conclusion

If a human life is to have meaning it must connect with something greater than itself in a way that produces good for others and provides future challenges, past achievements, interpersonal connection and fulfilment for the person whose life it is. Self-fulfilment is achieved by living according to one's nature, by being oneself. However, the familiar injunction, 'Be yourself!' is hardly helpful: how can you be yourself if you do not know who you are? A better prescription is 'Discover yourself!' But that gives no indication for how one is to go about the task. Self-discovery can be achieved only through a process of conjecture and refutation. Such a process will be more likely of success if conducted in an organised, critical and self-conscious way.

Self-discovery requires a critical attitude: one must be prepared to question, criticise and reject established views, including one's own most dearly held beliefs. That may cause one a great deal of discomfort, anxiety or sorrow.⁸ It further requires acting in new ways, some of which may be unconventional, sometimes incurring public disapproval or worse; and some trials of kinds of life may turn out to be unpleasant, even extremely unpleasant in some cases. It may also involve campaigning for institutional or other social change. Indeed, campaigning and the struggle, achievements and failures that are bound up with it may be a part of one's nature. Consequently, fulfilment will rarely, if ever, be simply a matter of

⁸ For example, Hume (1739), book I, part IV, section VII; Russell (1967), pp. 42-52.

hedonistic satisfaction or of feelings of euphoria or bliss. Such feelings, one suspects, will be present *to some extent* in all lives that are fulfilling for the people who live them; but pleasures will not figure largely for someone whose most fulfilling life is that of an ascetic, and some people seem to find fulfilment in being miserable.

My biggest regret is that it took me so long to discover who I am, especially since I was offered many valuable opportunities to do so but turned my back on them. I had closed my mind to such options because I accepted uncritically theories about how I should live that were part of the culture in which I grew up, instead of querying those theories and testing alternatives to them through experimentation. If anyone suggested that I was a transvestite or a homosexual (as some people did), I was offended, which is a sure sign of a closed mind. For instance, when I worked as a full-time barman, in my early twenties, some of the customers assumed that I was a girl and referred to me as “love” or “darling.” I was a secret transvestite with homosexual fantasies, so I should have been flattered. I knew that I was easily mistaken for a girl, being long-haired, small, slim and pretty, so I should have corrected such a mistake in a friendly way. Instead, my uncritical attachment to the theory that I am a heterosexual macho-man meant that I took offence. I became tense and I acted aggressively in response. Even when I eventually did experiment with submission, masochism, transvestism and homosexuality, the experimentation, and what I learned from it, was limited because my lingering, uncritical adherence to inherited cultural taboos meant that I distanced myself from what I was doing.

If one is to discover oneself and lead a fulfilling life, one must investigate and appraise critically different ways of living and try out some of them, taking care to learn lessons in the process. In order to do that at all effectively, one must be prepared to question and criticise received views and one must welcome challenges and criticism to views that one holds dear and that even seem, at the moment, to be part of one’s identity. If, instead of responding with closed-minded dudgeon, I had considered rationally the suggestions that I was a homosexual Nancy-boy, and experimented with same-sex relationships with an open and critical mind, it seems that I would have discovered much sooner a very important part of my nature, lived a far more fulfilling life, and avoided much of the misery that I suffered myself and caused for others.

For someone who pursues an organised project of self-discovery, life and philosophical autobiography become intertwined. When one makes an important

decision affecting the course of one's life, one considers not only information relating to the options for decision currently being faced and their likely consequences, but also available theories about how to live and one's previous appraisals of them, one's current theory about oneself (which one holds open to criticism), and lessons learned from past experiments with kinds of life. Thinking such matters through requires writing them down, deducing consequences and evaluating them. Living becomes to a significant extent a process of conjecture and refutation; and the record of the theories considered and evaluated, the major decisions made, the theories refuted, the lessons learned, and the assessments of fulfilment at different junctures, forms the draft of a philosophical autobiography.

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