



The Art of Change
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Published: 2011

Categorie(s): Non-Fiction, Religion, Philosophy, Self-help

Tag(s): self-help anxiety depression

Part 1

Preface

I have never purchased a book that was categorized in the self-help section of a bookstore, although I have purchased many books with the hope of helping myself. My first books were fiction, mostly fantasy and science fiction, and I read them as a means of escape from the everyday. Not unlike a drug, I would become lost in fictional worlds of good and evil, where almost always the heroes would prevail. Hours went by quickly while I was reading in bed, and upon finishing a book, I would feel a sense of journey, accomplishment, and subtle sadness which as an adult is the feeling you have after returning home from the perfect vacation, knowing you must go to work the next day. I never wanted these books to end. I didn't want to leave alien worlds where morality had a clear purpose.

Fantastic fiction was a form of comfort and support for my young body, but as I grew older, I derived less and less self-help from these types of books, and almost stopped reading them entirely, only occasionally picking out a novel that had an appealing cover. I kept on reading, of course, but I restricted my appetite primarily to academic-like texts where knowledge is laid out on the page for easy access. Because I traded epic-fiction for books of science, I must assume that both sorts of books were fulfilling a similar purpose in me. The fiction provided escape and moral certainty, while science promised the certainty of knowledge and hope.

The benefits of scientific texts soon wore off as well, and it was no longer enough to bury my thoughts in the fruits of a scientific method. Science for me was an escape, not unlike reading fantasy. Although many people pursue science because they believe it is the one true way to knowledge, I did so primarily to find comfort. It was a form of self-therapy. I was still interested in biology and chemistry. I would continue to read textbooks on gravitation and relativity, and even commit to books on applied and pure mathematics; but the usefulness of organized science faded for me. I am not claiming that I learned everything one could learn in science, only that I learned most of what I needed to know.

During medical school I began to explore philosophy, likely for the same reasons that I had taken up science and fantasy before. Up until that time I had considered most of philosophy useless. What good were the theories of long dead men to me? It's true. I took one philosophy course in college—introduction to ethics—but I wasn't passionate about the subject, or so I thought. I took the course for a requirement and a grade. In college and before there was no chance of me picking up a

book of philosophy for pleasure, and I suppose that most of you could say the same. Those of us drawn to philosophy for fun are a dying breed; you need only go to your local bookstore—which is also a dying breed—and measure the size of the philosophy section, if it exists at all.

Philosophy, too, is running its course. I am still left with discomfort, but I am far better for the effort. The individual statements that follow cannot be taken in isolation. Each point depends upon the others, and much of what I say is knowingly contradictory. Good luck.

Part 2

Introduction

Your despair, your fears; your guilt, anxiety, and shame—these are not minor concerns that occasionally require cleaning and touch-up work to keep them under control. If there is the tiniest *mental* bug that is eating away at you, or a gross cognitive monster preventing you from finding peace, then *not* doing something about it is tantamount to condemning yourself to personal hell on earth. You are living trapped in yourself, forced to suffer under the domination of a torturer that is partly you.

You have little time to make changes, and every moment that passes is potential wasted, assuming you still wish to change. No book will offer you freedom, and the self-help books that promise salvation are for the most part illicit narcotics, supplied to unsuspecting consumers that believe they are receiving a cure when in truth they are swallowing pills that continue the disease. Self-help cannot change your life because it does not strike out at you; it does not stretch your mental and moral fibers. The procedures described in self-help have little potential to alter the problem of you, and without vigilant behavior and thought-policing, they are completely useless.

You are the government that rules yourself.

The industries of self-help and psychological services do not appreciate the gravity of self-change. They treat self-change as a peaceful exercise that one may, on a cool summer day, undertake with a glass of lemonade while you rest on a hammock in the shade. A few witty paragraphs, a new secret, and some helpful advice to function better in social relations are all we need, they tell us. *But is not self-change a battle between who you are now and the person who you hope to become?* Like corporations that compete for market share, sports teams that compete for titles, and nations that battle for land; you are a domain where different versions of you battle for the precious prize of awareness and choice.

Self-change, like any battle, demands sacrifice, struggle, and conflict; and cannot be had by sitting on the sidelines or by mere hope. Positive thought can do nothing against the forces that threaten you. Do not expect a fair fight. The person you are this moment—the person who suffers now—is far stronger, more clever, and has better weapons than the *image* of the person you hope to become. The person you hope to be, the future you, exists as a potentiality in your imagination, and as an abstract vision, can only influence you indirectly like a ghost displaced from reality.

To change, you must form a revolution within yourself to overthrow the government that is you. It will not be easy. Parts of you will be lost forever.

Part 3

Main

1.

If you are attempting to change, then you are the enemy of yourself.

2.

After you change, you will notice something new—you will see how you have always been.

3.

If you want to change but cannot, then a force must be acting to prevent your change. That force may be you.

4.

Change is a gamble. You will certainly lose parts of yourself if you change, but there is no guarantee that you will gain anything.

5.

No self wants to change because change is destruction of the present self. Know that if you change, the present self, the self reading these words, will no longer exist.

6.

You may desire to change, but also desire that your new, changed-self will still be recognizable as you—as you are this moment. These desires are incompatible. You cannot be both 'the person who desires to change now' and 'the person who has changed.'

7.

Self-change is a battle. Be prepared to suffer. If you cannot tolerate being uncomfortable, then you are not prepared to change. If you are not ready to change now, seek allies in yourself and others, rest, build strength until you are strong enough to tolerate the anxiety of transformation.

8.

Only attempt change when you are ready. The desire to change is not enough.

9.

To say or think "I want to change" means only "I am not ready for change". Like your neighbor who says "I would like to help you, but..." means only "helping you is not my priority, I will not help you."

IDENTITY

10.

To become someone new, first you must see who you are in the present, then you must see who you hope to become. It is difficult, if not impossible, to chart a course to a destination if you do not know where the journey begins.

11.

To know yourself is to know your strategy for navigating through existence. Self-knowledge is the strategy, the program, the subroutines

that generate your output in thought and action. In playing chess and waging war, if you know your opponent's strategy, you can defeat him cleanly. The same can be said of the self—only in knowing your own strategy can you defeat yourself, and only in defeat do we change.

12.

You are not your brain.

13.

So you are depressed? Your depression may be related to a recent argument with a friend, loss of a loved one, brain cancer, a stroke, withdrawal from speed, obesity, loss of faith, disrupted childhood attachment, a specific distribution of molecules in your brain. Neither science nor religion understand the nature of mood or emotion—be skeptical of anyone who tells you otherwise.

14.

Some different ways to achieve self-change: cutting out part of your brain, going through a traumatic event, emotionally attaching to a new person, losing that attached person, swallowing or injecting a neuro-active molecule, living in a foreign country, seeing through old delusions, going through psychotherapy, growing a large brain tumor, growing older in time. Not all of these events lead to enduring self-change. All are dangerous.

15.

You are not your abilities.

16.

Your ability to make physical and mental changes is limited. You cannot lift a one-thousand pound rock because your body does not have the potential to do so, although throwing a one-pound rock is quite easy; that action is part of your potential. Mentally, you cannot take the square-root of ten digit number, or immediately change a feeling of joy into depression and vice-versa. You can, however, hide your sadness long enough to get your business finished at work. Both mind and body necessarily possess limited potential in the world, so do not be ashamed of your limitations in either domain—they are expected and therefore normal.

17.

You do not *have* thoughts, feelings, and beliefs—you *are* your thoughts, feelings, and beliefs. You are also your behaviors and actions. I have proof here: without these things, there is little left of you.

18.

By choosing new thoughts, beliefs and behaviors, you choose to become something new

19.

Repetition of thoughts and behaviors is often a sign of failure—and success.

20.

The variability of the self can be understood as a structure, a dynamical system with resonant modes, preferred oscillations, possible and prohibited transitions and interactions, inertia, basins of attraction, stable and unstable patterns. This is the language of dynamical systems. The self is not a dynamical system, but the movements and changes of the self can be translated into this language.

21.

Planets and stars are in constant motion, although the relations, the equations that define this motion are fixed and unchanging. The self also undergoes continual movement, where the Self, You, is the unchanging relation that defines your motion. You are an invariant of the dynamics of you. Changing yourself is akin to changing the laws of physics within yourself.

22.

Your possible experiences, thoughts, and feelings are determined by the shape of your Self. You will never experience thoughts that are incompatible with your Self-relation. To have new thoughts and feelings and behaviors, you must transform into a Self that allows those new things.

23.

Change requires an energy expenditure in your self.

24.

Change requires an active force in your self.

25.

Emotions are a signal of mental force—either a force of change or a force of stability.

26.

If you believe that a pill, book, person, or theory will take away your pain and suffering; then you will never be free of your pain and suffering.

27.

The way you see yourself this moment has very little in common with how you are. It is better to ask for each situation "How should I see myself now?" and then try to see yourself in this way. If you are convinced that you are a particular way, then ask "Why do I need to be this way?" rather than assuming that your perceptions are clear and true.

28.

The way you view others also has little in common with how they are. Either actively choose how you wish to see someone, or ask yourself "Why do I need to see this person this way now?" rather than assuming you can see the truth of someone else. You do not know the complexities of yourself, and can scarcely see the shadows of another person.

29.

Most (not all) friends and families will want to keep you exactly the way you are. You would be surprised, horrified, to know that your closest allies need you to be depressed and anxious. Pity them, for they are as scared to change as you.

30.

Your enemies may encourage your growth much more efficiently than your friends.

JUDGEMENT, BLAME, AND ACCEPTANCE

31.

You should both hate and love yourself until these ways of feeling no longer make sense.

32.

To be hated, the object of hate must be meaningful to us. The reason you neither love nor hate random scribbles on a page is because those scribbles lack any meaning.

33.

If you experience self-hatred most of the time, then you have developed a bad habit. The same can be said of self-love.

34.

You cannot change if you worship yourself.

35.

You cannot change if you condemn yourself. Hating oneself prevents change, although being nauseous of oneself is often useful.

36.

Acceptance of oneself is not always a peaceful state. It can be a brutal, scientific honesty that evokes frigid disgust, like believing that

you are a beautiful, sublime creature of incandescent warmth, and then looking into the mirror to see the oozing, rotting remains of a diseased cockroach. Acceptance is when you see the cockroach in yourself, vomit with disgust at your new reflection in the mirror, then acknowledge that the image you see is more true than your past belief of beauty.

37.

It is possible to accept yourself too fully.

38.

Acceptance is essential for change. If you feel weak and pathetic, accept that you feel weak and pathetic and these feelings may lessen. If you feel omnipotent, accept this feeling and it may lessen as well.

39.

I am pathetic. And so are you. We are also sublime

40.

To change something you must become part of that thing, at least for an instant. To break a brick it must be struck by a hammer. In the moments when the hammer touches brick, they become a single object through physical interaction, momentum-energy is transferred, and the brick breaks. Change requires an interaction. To change oneself, you must become one with the parts you wish to change, you must interact with these parts. This is called acceptance.

41.

There is a self that is you.
This self does not want to be what it is.
Rejection of oneself is an aspect of the self.

The paradox of self-change: honest acceptance of oneself is a form of self-change if one wants to change.

42.

Praise and blame are tools for controlling others. We praise others when we want them to do 'more of the same,' we blame others when we want them to act differently (to stop doing 'what they are doing'). These are useful tools for sculpting the behaviors of children, but they serve little purpose when applied to adults.

43.

Blaming other people and circumstances for your inability to change makes it impossible for you to change. Blaming yourself makes it impossible as well. Who shall we blame? No one and nothing. Blaming yourself or others is useless. So is praise.

44.

Praise and blame are useless, but recognizing responsibility is not.

45.

It is possible to take responsibility for something without praising or blaming yourself or someone else for that thing.

46.

Lack of blame does not mean that we ignore criminal behavior. We may hold a criminal accountable for a crime, and even punish the criminal, but at no point need we blame anyone.

47.

Disgust at yourself has nothing to do with negative *judgment*. By disgust I mean the same feeling you have when looking at a pile of rotting flesh: the flesh is neither good nor evil, it is simply something that makes you want to vomit. It is possible to be disgusted by yourself without judging yourself as evil or bad. Most people confuse these—they flippantly say ‘I disgust myself,’ but have no visceral reaction whatsoever, and only mean ‘I’m judging myself as bad.’

48.

Hating yourself is exhausting. Blaming yourself is tiring. You cannot change if you exhaust your energy on these activities.

49.

To change, you must learn to separate judgments from emotions. You can be angry at someone without thinking that person is bad or evil. You can be disgusted at someone without judging that person negatively. Separate these within yourself and you will find new freedom.

THINKING AND BELIEF

50.

All thinking is neutral. If a thought appears positive or negative, it is only because you have learned to associate it with a belief. Become flexible and see the exact same thought as both positive and negative.

51.

Thinking is a mechanical process where types of meaning are strung together to form more complex meanings. Neither positive nor negative thinking exist. There is only Energetic Belief and Impotent Belief. Energetic Belief creates and destroys, while Impotent Belief is nothing more than wasteful friction.

52.

Your thoughts are not your beliefs. Your beliefs are relatively fixed parts of you that change slowly if at all, while your thoughts meander about and change second-to-second. Learn to separate thoughts from beliefs, and you will find it easier to change.

53.

The self-help industry of positive thinking relies upon two findings: (1) when we repeat a thought or story enough times, sometimes we come to believe that story; and (2) if we already believe a story, then repeating that story tends to perpetuate the belief. This is useful to know, but it is not enough.

54.

Many of your beliefs are stories that you—or others—repeat about you.

55.

No belief may go unquestioned. If the belief withstands your most violent assault, hold on to it for now, then try to attack it at a later date

56.

The most cherished beliefs represent the greatest obstacles to change.

57.

Beliefs organize most of our thoughts, behaviors, and feelings. You will not change without changing at least a few of your cherished beliefs.

58.

Always assume you are lying to yourself. For every moment you distrust yourself, a million-million more moments will have passed by in which you believed yourself perfectly honest

59.

Every thought you have is true in some way—but not necessarily in the way you might think.

60.

Beliefs must not change too quickly. A quick change in belief is a signal that the self is trying to deceive you. An example – the atheist who quickly converts, and the pious individual who in a moment loses faith.

61.

Suspect self-deception at every turn. The self will do everything to preserve itself. It is a fierce and cunning warrior. It will lie and hide from you.

62.

You're not supposed to trust yourself if you are trying to change, but you must trust in someone or something.

63.

You must preserve many beliefs in the end.

COMFORT AND ANXIETY

64.

We avoid the things we fear and the things that disgust us. By learning to fear yourself, by becoming disgusted by yourself, you will begin to avoid your current self as well—this may be the first step to self-change. If you say "I already hate myself, I'm already disgusted with myself," then I haven't been clear. One must not judge oneself as bad. I repeat, disgust has nothing to do with judgement.

65.

The self can only change by walking within anxiety.

66.

The self's most powerful weapons are comfort and anxiety. By avoiding anxiety, we prevent change. By welcoming comfort, we prevent change. We avoid those thoughts and experiences that make us anxious. Those experiences that bring comfort act to maintain the dominance of the current self. Comfort is the signal that the self is not-changing. Anxiety is the bane of the current self because it announces that change may come.

67.

Do the things you do not want to do. Refuse to do the things you desire to do. The same may be said of thoughts. And make sure you are not harming others or yourself.

68.

Think the thoughts you fear.

69.

Too much anxiety may destroy the entire system. One must be careful when swimming within the waters of anxiety. Proceed with care.

70.

Worry is not anxiety. Worry is what thoughts do when the Self despairs. In other words, worry is a symptom of despair, and you will not cease worrying until you cease despairing.

71.

Some people say they are anxious all of the time. If you are always anxious, then you are perhaps resisting anxiety out of fear. It is like standing part-way in 70 degree ocean water while leaving the rest of your uncovered body in a cold breeze. Once you dive in you will likely feel fine, whereas standing in the cold breeze and fearing the water perpetuates your suffering.

72.

Comfort plays an important role in self-change—it allows one to tolerate a new anxiety, an anxiety that will one day fragment the walls that prevent us from becoming more.

73.

If you truly wish to begin a transformation, and you know that you are ready for failure, then throw all of your convictions into question and embrace an overwhelming uncertainty until you begin to feel new growth. Few people can honestly question even one conviction. By honesty I mean, you will feel an unraveling, anxious anxiety in the process of this questioning—it will be difficult.

74.

Uncertainty is the pathway to change. Certainty its opposite. Expected events, thoughts, and experiences will cause little change. The unexpected, however, has the potential for great change.

75.

Do not try to change alone—like climbing, most of us require a partner for safety.

MORALE

76.

Change is neither good nor evil. One may change and become less, or change and become more. There is one guidepost for useful change—if you change, do so that you respect and understand your

past self. If your new-self resents its old-self, then your work is not done.

77.

There is no self change without a disruption of your morality. After change, you will see some previous evils as good and some previous goods as evil. Most people never change because they are unwilling to modify their current moral stance.

78.

The relation between knowledge and change is multifaceted. One may learn and study many things and change very little. Often we choose to learn only things that perpetuate the current self, thus learning often prevents change. By studying topics you are not interested in, by reading works by people you disagree with, you may change much.

79.

Most of your problems this moment have existed for your entire lifetime. Many will be present the instant before you die.

Part 4
END

Few things must be more frightening than the feeling of truly losing your mind, although I speak without proof or evidence for I have not yet gone through this experience. I may have at least approached the edge of a lost mind once or twice, so I can partially simulate and predict what it might be like. If you are one of the fortunate ones who lost your mind and then returned to tell the tale, welcome back. I would like to hear your story someday.

Most of us have, however, had the so-called experience of going crazy for brief periods: when everything momentarily begins to lose sense and meaning, when familiar faces appear foreign, distorted, unwelcoming; and when our sense of self, of who we think we are starts to suddenly, slightly breakdown. The going-crazy process brings with it a bolus of anxiety that represents a sudden uncertainty of the world and ourselves. You see, going crazy means approximately, becoming uncertain about *everything* that previously felt solid and steady—an acute destruction of the familiar.

Where you live is hopefully an example of the familiar. The walk to your doorway, the arrangement of the furniture, the color of the walls, the smells, the pictures on the wall, the lighting; all of these come together to create the familiar experience of home. Familiar experiences are common and repeated. They are our calming, expected sensations. You expect your home to be a certain way; if the furniture is rearranged or a new painting is hung on the wall, you notice the change immediately because the object is foreign, and more, a change in just one object makes the entire room feel strange. Familiar things are not supposed to change, therefore when they do, we notice such a disturbance almost immediately.

If someone rearranges the furniture in your house without you knowing, when you first see this newly arranged room, you will immediately feel like something is wrong and punningly out-of-place. This feeling of wrongness is a mild to moderate jolt of anxiety resulting from a disturbance of the familiar, and is perhaps, in many, followed by anger. We have a similar experience when a trusted friend or romantic partner begins to act differently, and anyone who has been in an intimate relationship knows that when a loved one changes, the resulting feelings can be quite uncomfortable and even disturbing. We will want more than anything to make things “the way they were”, to return to the familiar, and to alleviate the anxiety of change.

While your home is intensely familiar, and your family and friends as well, there is nothing more familiar than the experience of yourself.

You walk around each day, and everywhere you go, for every moment of time (while awake, aware

, etc...), you carry around an experience of yourself. I cannot describe what this experience might be like for you, nor can I even describe it for myself, but I do know it well. If scientists could give you the experience of different people by hooking your brain up to electrodes or otherwise, you could quickly choose yourself out of the line-up without difficulty, and when asked how you knew, you could only respond "because that one is me."

The experience of yourself is the most familiar experience you can have, so imagine how you would feel if you experienced yourself as changed or rearranged like the room. If your own self becomes suddenly unfamiliar and foreign, would you not become extremely anxious, unnerved, and feel as if you were losing your mind? Nothing is closer to you, more calming to you than who you are, and even if you do not like who you are, no experience is nearer to your heart than the continuous experience of yourself. To sense your self as changed would be nearly unbearable.

Now I can explain the most critical aspect of self-change, where without understanding, you will never change yourself. If you want to become someone new, or less ambitiously, permanently change some of your thought patterns and behaviors, then know well that the process of self-change is similar to briefly losing your mind. You will have to rearrange your self, and in doing so, face an unraveling and often overwhelming anxiety. You must be willing to abandon the comforting familiarity of your current self-home, and then face an alien home that you do not recognize, yet bravely decide to live in it nonetheless. The task of self-change is terribly difficult, for when facing the anxiety of losing your old self, your automatic reaction will be to 'put things back in place,' in other words, you will reflexively act to restore your self back to the familiar old you. To truly change, you must become foreign and unfamiliar to yourself, at least temporarily, until this foreign place of residence, after time, becomes familiar, warm, and cozy once again.



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Food for the mind