

Some Notes from L0oW-8 Meeting

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What does it mean to “know” something?

- to be familiar with our sensory experience of that physical thing (or many similar things);
- to be familiar with an idea about physical things or other ideas;
- to have developed a practiced skill with any of the above;

These are defensible meanings of the word “know”. There is also an indefensible meaning:

- to be absolutely certain of the correctness of one interpretation of the data.

I began “unknowing” the day I became a physicist. I became aware of this when I first read Popper and realized that there are no “facts” – only provisional conjectures about sensory input and its interpretation in terms of other provisional conjectures about interpretations of other input, sensory and otherwise. Even Popper’s refutations require a provisional acceptance of the validity of “conflicting data”, since in the strictest sense there is also no such thing as “data”.

The smug critics in Sociology are correct in their assertion that science is all a matter of consensus-building. But they are fools to conclude that one interpretation is therefore as good as another. Social relativism is not science, nor *vice versa*.

Science is how we decide which interpretation looks like the best bet. If the balance of evidence and familiarity shifts, we should be faithless in our eagerness to discard the old consensus and adopt a new one. (If we can find one. Sometimes that requires *surrender*.)

For the last few weeks I’ve been cultivating “infancy” (in Lyotard’s words, “the impertinent babble of childhood”; or, in Arendt’s words, “[H]e who acts never quite knows what he is doing, ... he always becomes ‘guilty’ of consequences he never intended or even foresaw.”)

I like Rachel Jones’ observation that “matter actively delimits the forms it can take” and thus the material world has its own “intelligence” and “personality”. This is the right answer

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to Quora questions about Science “controlling” Nature. We control nothing. We sometimes come to understand what Nature “wants to do” well enough to give Her a little assistance, and receive in turn a sort of “gratuity” for our help.

Deanna’s assignment for us: for 1 min the first day, 2 min 2nd day, and so on up to 30 min, perform some MINDFUL MOVEMENT – anything is okay – and then write down what it revealed to you.

- 16 Feb: Clumping slowly up and down the stairs in heavy boots that pinch, after a lot of snow-shovelling: some days, remembering a bouncier ascent, I feel old and tired.
- 17 Feb: At the gym I paid attention to the act of trying to remain *still* while holding a variety of bridges in Pilates. I noticed that “stillness” under stress is actually a series of small movements, especially when holding a balance is required. I use to be able to gradually reduce the number and amplitude of such corrections until they were almost too small to notice. I should try to get back my balance!
- 18 Feb: Today I was sick as a dog with either food poisoning or a sudden case of stomach flu. As I was lying there fighting nausea, I focused on breathing. I noticed that *exhaling* is a lot more gratifying than inhaling (unless of course you have been holding your breath) and that there is a certain equilibrium state where it takes almost no effort to take tiny breaths; but that there is no gratification in such breathing.

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- 20 Feb: Focused tonight on the one “movement” I will almost certainly continue to make constantly for the rest of my life: my heartbeat. Lying in bed I tried various ways of counting heartbeats: the pulse in my wrist is barely reliable, as it is sometimes weaker than other times and very sensitive to motion or pressing in the wrong place; fingertips under my left armpit pressed between the ribs give a nice hefty signal, but it fades when I breathe; the best is actually “*listening*” to the pulsing of my *tinnitus*, which I don’t normally even notice, but I reckon everyone probably has it and just ignores it normally. It’s also nice because you don’t have to actually *do* anything but count.

... Uh oh, I seem to have lost my focus again. ...

- 23 Feb: Well, I’m back...but I completely forgot about this commitment while I was sick. Today I finally felt well enough to go to the track for a workout. I focused on my *warmup*, which takes about 10 minutes, after which I do some stretching and start drills. Even when I’m in top shape, when I first set foot on the track I feel tired, sore and stiff; this is not an illusion. So first I walk a lap; the first 100 m I walk like an old man, limping and shuffling — well, not quite, but that’s how it feels at first. Then I get slightly looser and comfortable with lengthening my stride and picking up the pace. By the time I finish the walking lap I am getting bored, so I break into a gentle jog with about a meter between steps. My knees hurt a little at first, then they get greased up (well, that’s what it feels like) and I find my stride has gotten a little longer

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without my paying much attention to it; by the time I come around the 200 m mark, I'm comfortable with lengthening it to about 1.35 m, which I hold for the second 200 m. By now I am breathing hard and ready to start stretching.

- 24 Feb: Is it permissible to do a retrospective? After a month away from the track, I had the usual doubts about whether I was too out of shape to make a comeback; but as usual I did better than I expected. The thing I focused on (once I was reasonably well warmed up and stretched) was my steps between the green hurdle marks on the track: they are 40 yards (not meters!) apart for the 400m hurdles, and I know that if I can step over each line off my left foot 20 paces after the last line, I'm running a decent pace for a 300m hurdle race. I was able to do 21 consistently and 22 at the end of each set, so I felt pretty good.
- 25 Feb: Oops. This is harder than I thought!
- 26 Feb: Hurdles today. Warmed up, stretched out, did some hurdle drills, ran a few short sprints to work the kinks out, then 3 hurdles 5-stepping, then 3 hurdles 4-stepping, and finally 3 hurdles with 3 steps between (it's actually an even number of steps, of course, but we don't count the plant of the lead leg. Since the indoor 60 m hurdles are only 5 hurdles, I reckon I can still do it. Whew! Now to decide if I can afford to go to the Canadian indoor championships in Edmonton March 8-10. Deadline for registration is this Friday. Argh! \$\$\$!

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Okay, I failed Deanna's assignment. I did get in almost 10 days' worth, but I'm pretty sure what I was doing wasn't quite what she had in mind. And after a while I ran out of ideas & steam. Sorry! As Engelbert Humperdinck would say, "Please, release me!"