

Curiosity: The Master Impulse

Curiosity is the master impulse behind all human progress and good things.

Every dominant belief and political structure are optimized as the antithesis of curiosity.

Curiosity is the greatest threat to concentrated power and prestige, so those who have power and prestige labor endlessly to create the mind-killing opposite of all curiosity. Consensus. Obedience. Being seen as “normal”, “in the know”, “respectable”.

Curiosity doesn't care about reputations and rules. That's why it's the only impulse with the power to cut through the human bullshit matrix and create progress and discovery.

The least respectable ideas often have more curiosity behind them than the most respected. It doesn't make the specific ideas any better or more true, but you can be sure that the curious impulse behind wacky ideas is more beneficial to humanity than the obedient prestige-seeking behind consensus.

It's impossible to overestimate the unpredictable power of raw curiosity unencumbered by the need to be seen as serious.

Death and Awakening

Curiosity is the ultimate flame of progress, growth, and meaning. It's what makes us most human, and pushes us closest to the divine.

Curiosity is what leads to breakthroughs.

If you look at the history of man you see a relentless curiosity. The same curiosity that turns people into martyrs and heretics brings humanity forward.

If there is a “great stagnation” as Peter Thiel, Tyler Cowen, and others believe, it is the stagnation of curiosity. The battle against curiosity has been waged since the beginning of time by tyrants, despots, authoritarians, and fear-mongers. And for the last 100 years or so, curiosity has been losing. The entire schooling system is one gigantic effort to contain curiosity. Credentialism, official bodies and bureaucrats, licenses, unified master plans, oustings and labelings are systematic battles against curiosity.

Obedience is the antithesis of curiosity. Curiosity is dangerous. Curiosity, to paraphrase C.S. Lewis, is not safe, but it's good.

You can see the dominant impulses today are the opposite of curiosity. Climate change fear and the idea of “consensus” is the enemy and opposite of all curiosity. It's a mind

killer. It's a progress killer. It leads to death and stagnation. Unmitigated trust in scientific and medical professionals is a curiosity killer. There is a lot of dead curiosity lingering in the heart of every human on the planet.

Or maybe it's just dormant. And maybe it's awakening just a bit.

In fact, there is a lot of hope right now.

Curiosity has new vistas as wide ranging as a renewed interest in spirituality and Jordan Peterson to conspiracy theories that spread on 4chan and Reddit. These are good, whether or not they're true. Forget the specifics of individual claims or beliefs. The fact that people are yearning for and exploring ideas considered wacky and out of bounds by the curiousless consensus is good.

Curiosity is good. Curiosity is ready to have a new dawn. And humanity is desperate for its master impulse to awaken again.

Ancient aliens. The flat earth. Political conspiracy. Religious resurgence. Jung. Archetypes. Alchemy. Astrology. Myths. UFOs. The "Invisible College". The Mandela Effect. Time travel. Simulation theory. Planetary colonization.

What do they have in common?

They live only in a world where curiosity is not dead. Even as the cost of exploration outside the curiosity killing norms grows, so too do the number of people playing around with heretical ideas.

Again I emphasize, it's not important what percentage of these ideas are "correct". What's important is the courage to play with the ideas. Those who play with crazy ideas are the R&D arm for humanity. They move us forward not only with their discoveries, but with their attitude. Nothing is more deeply human than relentless curiosity.

Anti-Science?

Unbridled curiosity is the root of all breakthroughs. Slavish repetition and rule-following kills it. Typically a few generations after a breakthrough by a curious tinkerer, a school of soul-dead followers canonize the details and fear deviation. The spirit through which disciplines are born are smothered by the formalization of the disciples.

If you think wild, crazy, weird, mystical, politically, socially, and philosophically dangerous ideas aren't behind the progress of humanity, think again.

Here is a passage on the heroes of science, and their obsession with forbidden knowledge, secret societies, and mysticism:

WHEN WE PEER INTO THE HIDDEN LIVES of the heroes of science, the people who forged the mechanical world-view and made the great leaps forward in technology that have made our lives so much safer, easier and more pleasant, we often find they are deeply immersed in esoteric thought – particularly alchemy.

We might also consider the lesser but related paradox that many of the world's most notorious occultists and outlandish visionaries were also in their own way practically minded men, often responsible for smaller but nevertheless significant inventions.

Looking at both groups together, it is difficult to see a clear distinction between scientists and occultists, even as we move into modern times. Rather there is a spectrum in which the individual is a bit of both, albeit to varying degrees.

Paracelsus, perhaps the most revered of occultists, revolutionized medicine by introducing the experimental method. He was also the first to isolate and name zinc, made great breakthroughs in the importance to medicine of hygiene and also was the first to formulate principles which would come to underlie homeopathy.

Giordano Bruno is a great hero of science because he was burned at the stake in 1600 for insisting that the solar system is heliocentric. But as we have already seen, this was because he believed fervently in the ancient wisdom of the Egyptians. He believed that the earth goes round the sun because, in the first instance, so too did the initiate priests of the ancient world.

Robert Fludd, the occult author and defender of the Rosicrucians, also invented the barometer.

Jan Baptiste van Helmont, the Flemish alchemist, was important in the secret societies for reintroducing into Western esotericism ideas of

reincarnation – which he called ‘the revolution of humane souls’. He also separated gases in the course of his alchemical experiments, coined the word ‘gas’, and in the course of experiments on the healing powers of magnets, coined the word ‘electricity’.

Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, the German mathematician, was Newton’s rival in the devising of the calculus. In Leibniz’s case his discoveries arose out of fascination with cabalistic number mysticism which he shared with his close friend, the Jesuit scholar of the occult Athanasius Kircher. In 1687 Kircher, an alchemical student of the properties of the vegetable dimension, resurrected a rose from its ashes in front of the Queen of Sweden. Leibniz himself has also provided us with the most detailed and credible account of the alchemical transformation of base metals into gold.

The Royal Society was the great intellectual engine of modern science and technological invention. Among Newton’s contemporaries, Sir Robert Moray published the world’s first ever scientific journal, Philosophical Transactions – and was a fervent researcher into Rosicrucian teaching. The strange monk-like figure of Robert Boyle, whose law of thermodynamics paved the way for the internal combustion engine, was a practising alchemist. In his youth he wrote of having been initiated into an ‘invisible college’. Also practising alchemists were Robert Hooke, inventor of the microscope, and William Harvey, discoverer of the circulation of the blood.

Descartes, who fathered rationalism in the mid-seventeenth century, spent a considerable amount of time trying to track down the Rosicrucians and in researching their philosophy. He rediscovered the ancient, esoteric idea of the pineal gland as the gateway to consciousness, the inner eye, and his philosophical breakthrough came to him all of a piece while in a visionary state. His most famous dictum may be seen as a recasting of the Rosicrucian teaching

intended to help foster the evolution of an independent, intellectual faculty: I must think in order to be.

Frontispiece, designed by John Evelyn, to the official history of the Royal Society, published in 1667. Francis Bacon is depicted as the founding father. He sits under the wing of an angel in a way that echoes the closing phrase of the Fama Fraternitatis of the Rosicrucians.



Blaise Pascal, one of the great mathematicians of his day and an eminent philosopher, was discovered after his death to have sewn into his cloak a piece of paper on which was written: 'The year of grace 1654, Monday 23 November, day of St Clement, Pope and Martyr. From about half-past ten in the evening until about half-past twelve at night, FIRE.' Pascal achieved the illumination that the monks of Mount Athos sought.

In 1726 Jonathan Swift in Gulliver's Travels predicted the existence and orbital periods of the two moons of Mars, which were not discovered by astronomers using telescopes until 1877. The astronomer, who then saw how accurate Swift had been, named the moons Phobos and Deimos – fear and terror – so awestruck was he by Swift's evident supernatural powers.

Emmanuel Swedenborg, the great eighteenth-century Swedish visionary, wrote detailed accounts of his journeys into the spirit worlds. His reports of what the disembodied beings he met there told him inspired the esoteric Freemasonry of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. He was also the first to discover the cerebral cortex and the ductless glands, and also engineered what is still the largest dry dock in the world.

As we have already seen, Charles Darwin attended séances. He may

have had the opportunity to learn the esoteric doctrine of the evolution from fish to amphibian to land animal to human from his close association with Max Müller, early translator of sacred Sanskrit texts.

Nicholas Tesla, recently described by a historian of science as ‘the ultimate visionary crank’, was a Serbian Croat who became a naturalized American. There he patented some seven hundred inventions including fluorescent lights and the Tesla coil that generates an alternating current. Like Newton’s most important breakthroughs, this last arose out of his belief in an etheric dimension between the mental and physical planes.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries many leading scientists thought it worthwhile to pursue a scientific approach to occult phenomena, believing that it would ultimately be possible to measure and predict occult forces such as etheric currents that seemed only a shade more elusive than electromagnetism, sound waves or x-rays. Thomas Edison, inventor of the phonograph and therefore the godfather of all recorded sound, and Alexander Graham Bell, inventor of the telephone, both supposed that psychic phenomena were perfectly respectable areas of research for science, involving themselves in esoteric Freemasonry and theosophy. Edison tried to make a radio that would tune into the spirit worlds. Their great scientific discoveries arose out of this research into the supernatural. Even the television was invented as a result of trying to capture psychic influences on gases fluctuating in front of a cathode ray tube.

(From chapter 23 of, A Secret History of the World, by Mark Booth.)

This is not accident or coincidence. Curious people follow the white rabbit down strange paths. Because their desire for answers is stronger than their desire to fit in.

Fitting in is a shackle on the mind.

The Enemies

You are the enemy of curiosity.

Your desire to gain prestige and status from others. Your desire to “win” the games created by others. Career games. Education games. Title games. Awards games. Fame games. Money games.

The only game worth playing is the game of chasing down your questions and desires. But it's easy to forget that. We want to feel alive, and a quick hit of respectability from strangers does the trick. For a minute. Then we need more. And the more we prioritize it the deeper enslaved we become.

When pursuing prestige, our mind becomes our enemy. We must restrain it and bend and form it to the collective blob of drooling thoughtless belief in “What we all know”.

No! Every theory deserves questioning. Every assumption deserves scrutiny. Nothing is out of bounds.

The enemies of curiosity never tell you why pursuing magic or faith healing or inter-dimensional travel or religion or moon landing conspiracies is a waste of time. They don't make arguments about the ideas themselves. They only appeal to prestige. They tell you people who chase those rabbits are dumb. They tell you of the social cost you'll endure. They tell you it's a waste of time because “they” have already settled these things. Why repeat the work of getting answers “we” already have?

The enemies of curiosity think the only things worth pursuing are new additions to the body of accepted knowledge. Examining the foundations is silly. But the foundations are always wrong. Questioning *everything*, all that is established, known, sacred, and solid; that is the role of curiosity.

It doesn't help to blame others. The enemy within who desires respectability over truth is the one you need to defeat.

Stoke the Flame

Crazy ideas reveal thought processes.

Most people shut down crazy questions because it would be too much work to refute them point-by-point. Not because they cannot be refuted – most can, because few crazy ideas turn out to be true – but because most of us have never done the work necessary to justify the beliefs we hold.

“Prove to me the earth isn’t flat” is the question of a curious mind. It is a good question. It’s good because it forces us to think through how we know what we know. It exposes our direct experience as the pathetic sliver it is. If you can’t prove it through direct observation, how can you? What if appealing to experts or second-hand accounts doesn’t count? Can you reason to it? These questions stimulate real thought.

Embracing such questions brings humility. It reveals how silly absolute thinking is in most cases. It uncovers incentives and probabilities. You begin to analyze the likelihood that person X is correct, or why person Y might benefit by exaggerating. It shows complexity and uncertainty and the amount of knowledge that is guesswork.

The kinds of questions small children ask are pure curiosity. “Why is the sky blue?” How many adults still ask that? Did they stop asking because they completely understand the answer, or because they stopped being curious? Because it would be “weird” to ask such questions?

Kids want to know why all the myths and stories and movies are full of super powers, but they don’t see anyone leaping buildings or reading minds around them. Do you know why? Are you fully satisfied with your answers? Why? Because it seems like a waste of time to think about it, or because you have a thorough understanding of what’s possible? Did answers come, or did curiosity leave?

We Don’t Know Anything

Take archaeology. Archaeologists have no idea what to make of their field.

There are thousands of ancient structures that no one knows anything about.

From elaborate underground cities to buried megaliths, there are countless pieces of the past that no one knows who created, when, why, or how. We are utterly stumped. Hundreds of times over.

And that’s just with the stuff that’s been found.

New amazing things are discovered all the time. Not just little things that add detail to notions of the past. Things that make previous theories impossible.

Only twenty years ago, an entire Egyptian city declared by all the academic experts to be a myth, was found at the bottom of the Mediterranean. Much like the city of Troy, it was found not by a “professional”, but a hobbyist who was more dedicated than any tenure-seeking conservative with little curiosity. A businessman from France raised the funds and spent years combing the seafloor while the academics sat on their asses. He found temples, statues, jewelry, pottery, canals, docks, and hundreds of ships. The find proved

that Egyptians were seafaring and robust trade with Greece was ongoing.

A few decades ago in Turkey a site was found 50 times larger than Stonehenge. It's still 95% buried, but what has been uncovered is a complete knockdown of all previous textbook history. It looks to be nearly 12,000 years old and way more sophisticated than anything that age is supposed to be. Nobody really understands it.

Also recently discovered was the largest yet crater from an apparent asteroid strike under the ice in Greenland. This thing was bigger than the one thought to have killed off the dinosaurs, but appears to have occurred much more recently.

This is just scratching the surface. How many places under the ocean or buried in earth are there? Whale bones have been found in the Sahara. Virtually none of the Sahara has ever been explored or excavated. What else could be there?

We know so little about our own history, let alone the history of plants, animals, and the climate of this planet. Accepted history covers a laughable sliver and does a laughable job even of that.

Accuracy is Impossible

I'll never forget when I worked in the Michigan state capitol and would see various events and protests. The next day I'd read coverage in the newspaper. More often than not, the coverage described (and sometimes even depicted with fudged photos) events that were nothing at all like what I witnessed firsthand. That was one day later, from a source of the same language with a shared culture in an age of internet access. And still, what was printed was accepted by the majority of Michiganders yet it was woefully inaccurate.

Remove any ability for counter-narratives. Throw in different, even dead languages. Throw in radically different cultural contexts and ways of describing things. Oh, and add not a few days or weeks or even years, but centuries or millennia.

The idea that history paints an accurate picture or that archaeology can map out the details of the past is beyond ludicrous.

Of course we must try! But we should be humble enough to see these as best guesses given current information, never as "consensus" (a word that does not belong in a serious and ongoing intellectual discipline, but to religions and dead lines of thought).

A curious mind should rejoice at all this mystery. Somehow the most credentialed are almost without exception threatened by it. They gave up the journey of discovery when they got on the road to status and tenure.

So Much More

That's just a glimpse into one discipline.

We don't know what gravity is, why the moon orbits like it does, what the billions of bacteria in our bodies do, how viruses work or whether they are living, or why we experience time as flowing forward.

No question or theory is out of bounds. Explore them all. Ask why old theories got dropped and what made current "consensus" win. (The answers are unflattering to the consensus peddlers.) Ask what would happen if we scrapped all our assumptions. Ask.

Curiosity doesn't just lead to knowledge for humanity. It leads to being fully alive on the individual level.

Stay curious.